OTHER WORLDS
SCIENCE STORIES

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March, 1957

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NEW LAMPS
Robert Moore Williams

MR. SCIENCE FICTION

TRI-INFINITY
40,000 Word Novelet
By BARRY P. MILLER

Other Tongues -- Other Flesh

George Hunt Williamson

In more recent times, there has been a growing realization that on other worlds than ours, even in other universes, there are other living beings. The idea that earth-bound man may someday journey into the heavens to discover other men and women, like or unlike himself, grows by leaps and bounds. Within man's soul lies the truth — mortals exist on other spheres!

Here is a book that brings home this tremendous fact with a dynamic force and sweep that will astound the reader, and convince him beyond all doubt. Here is a HISTORY, a collection of PROOF, and a tremendous THEORY.

While man in his heart knows that other worlds are also inhabited, he is reluctant to admit that Earth is only one small house of the "many mansions" in the Father's house. But the truth stares him in the face, and now, having arrived at a place in his civilization where only Truth will be able to survive, it has become necessary to reaffirm and establish three truths, namely: (1) Science and religion are one and the same thing; (2) The entire universe is magnetic in nature, and even culture is influenced by the laws of magnetism; (3) Space visitors, mentioned in the Bible and ancient mythology, have been coming to Earth throughout the ages, and are now making themselves known to aid mankind in entering a New Age.

In this book, many references and quotations are given from the latest authentic reports on Saucer phenomena. Because many believe there are contradictions in some of the reported happenings, it has been necessary to show that there is a great story and purpose behind all these experiences.

Here, in this book, is the history of OTHER TONGUES, and of OTHER FLESH; calm, scientific evidence that there are brothers of ours in the skies overhead.

We are not alone in the Universe!

WRITTEN BY A SCIENTIST AND A SCHOLAR

George Hunt Williamson served with the Army Air Corps during World War II as Radio Director for the Army Air Forces Technical Training Command. He received the Army Commendation Award from Brig. Gen. C. W. Lawrence for his outstanding record of service. He served as an instructor in Anthropology for the United States Armed Forces Institute.

He attended Cornell College, Eastern New Mexico University, the University of Arizona, and took a special course at the University of Denver. He majored in anthropology with many courses in sociology, biology, philosophy and geology.

In 1948 he was awarded the coveted Gold Key for outstanding scientific research by the Illinois State Archaeological Society. He has spent a great deal of time doing field-work in Social Anthropology in the northern part of the United States, Mexico and Canada. He is an authority on Indian dances, music and ceremonial costuming.

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Front cover photos: Mr. Science Fiction, by Paul Blaisdell; others from the movies "Fire Maidens of Space" and "The Day The World Ended". Illustration by Dan L. Adkins.

OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

MARCH
1957

ISSUE NO. 21 (42)

Published Every Other Month By

PALMER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
806 DEMPSTER STREET
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Editorial offices: Other Worlds, Amherst, Wisconsin. Subscriptions: 12 issues $3.00; 24 issues $6.00. No unsolicited manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by return envelope and sufficient postage; nor is any responsibility accepted for such manuscripts, photographs or art work. No specific rate of payment is offered, being by arrangement only. Any similarity of characters in stories or articles to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. Printed in U.S.A. by Stephens Printing Corporation, Sandusky, Ohio.

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....Editorial...

WHEN you looked at our cover this issue, you probably noticed that there has been a change in OTHER WORLDS. Then, if you looked inside, you found other changes - - the new type-face, for instance. And if you were really observant, you noticed that the story "New Lamps" by Robert Moore Williams, advertised on the front cover, wasn't in the issue.

Well, all these are signs of a growing shakeup in what is rapidly becoming your favorite magazine. We say "rapidly becoming" because we are judging from your letters concerning our recent stories. It began with the very popular Novakkan series by Hal Annas, continued with Arcot's "Timeless Man," and went on with Evelyn Martin's "Reluctant Eve" and finally with Byrne's "The Metamorphs." You have told us that we're "getting there" with our stories, and in no small fashion. Well, we had hoped we were, and although (among other things) your letter section was crowded out of this issue (our new fan section too!) we have the evidence at last that we are on the right track. So, with this issue, we give you Barry P. Miller's 40,000-word novelet (yes, that is what we call a novelet!) which we feel will "cap the climax." Here is a story your editor truly enjoyed, and he knows you will also! So, that shakeup we mention is, in a way now virtually complete, because from now on, we'll be giving you stories you will agree you just can't afford to miss.

But to go on about our shakeup we're giving you a beginning of a new development in covers with this issue. We weren't ready to proceed, quite yet, and we wanted to introduce Forrest J. Ackerman's new scientifilm department, so we made it the theme of this cover. We know you like science fiction movies too, and from now on you can get reliable tips from the expert himself, Mr. Science Fiction! However, in the future, we're going to do some new things with covers. For instance, the next cover, and this should be a surprise, will be done by your editor, that is, in part, at least. The original black-and-white drawing was done by Malcolm Smith, but the idea that it would ever be a color cover never entered his mind; so he will be as surprised as you when he sees it. Your editor, scrounging around for a "new effect," did discover one, and he's gone and got himself a whole flock of artist's supplies, boned up on various phases of something he knows nothing about - - art work, and proposes to blunder ahead with something entirely new to him! You can well imagine that some of the results will be pretty strange - - but on OTHER WORLDS, who will know the difference? We've seen "art" in some of the galleries that sent us reeling, and we hope our own efforts will fall into some sort of classification, even if we have to invent one!

Right about here we'd like to have your opinion. Back in 1955 we changed over from the digest-size magazine to the present pulp size. We had an idea there were those among you who preferred the larger size. However (and this will no

doubt delight the publishers of our rival magazines, who "told us so") the sales percentage on the larger issues dropped 6%, and stayed that way for six whole issues. That should have been enough to soak into even the hardest head, but ours is the stubborn kind. We like the large size, and your letters (most of them at least), have liked it. But we'd like a real sizable vote on it - - so will you drop us a card (or a letter, if you have the time) and tell us in no uncertain terms: "should we or shouldn't we" go back to the digest-size?

We had just about made up our minds to go back, and in fact had cancelled a paper order, when new figures began to come in. Oh, just a slight rise, perhaps 2%, but we'd certainly not change if eventually that 6% was restored. We have a strange feeling that it will, and that it is the stories we are now publishing that will do it - - and we're inclined to give it more time. However, if you readers actually disapprove of the large size, and want the digest back, you can get it by sending in your opinion! Either way. We have always felt that OTHER WORLDS is the readers' magazine, and their word is law. We have always tried to make it that way. So, let's have your word!

Coming soon in OTHER WORLDS is an article we've been hiding for an opportune moment. Some years ago, when Willy Ley, the German Rocket Scientist, published a book, we read it, and found ourselves disagreeing heartily with some of the things he said. Also, years ago, we read a book called "Science Is A Sacred Cow." Well, to be brief, we found some "sacred cows" in Willy Ley's book, and we decided that someday we'd "put them out to pasture" where they belonged.

Actually, Willy Ley is a friend of ours. We supported him when he was in Germany with Fritz Opel (in 1928), and we debated with him on flying saucers in Chicago, at one of the SF conventions - - he had the negative side, and naturally assumed he had won the debate because he threw a saucer into the air and got a big laugh from the house. However, he actually lost the debate by that act, because it was not precisely a conclusive scientific argument to our way of thinking. Ridicule is not the "scientific method." So, Mr. Ley "proved" that flying saucers were a "laughing stock," and there the matter rests (even though many reputable people continue to see the objects, without laughing). Now, we would like to take issue with Mr. Ley's own pets, his rockets!

Wham, zowie! You're going to the moon, Willy! But not in those silly rockets! Who ever heard of such a thing! Rockets, indeed! Go to the moon on a firecracker! How ridiculous!

And lest you think we're being humorous - - watch for our article! We hear the "big brass" is giving a long second look at rockets, and at outer space, and revising their ideas about it. Those revisions, we predict, are going to startle the world. Remember the old nursery rhyme "Hey diddle diddle - - and the cow jumped over the moon."? Well, maybe, just maybe, the author of that ancient thing was having his own private go at the "sacred cows" of his own day!

Mr. Ley, we say, is a great guy, but his moon rockets are sacred cows. As a matter of fact, we want to say, right now, that the geo-physical year will startle the world, but startle Mr. Ley even more.

Don't shoot those satellites too high, Willy! - - Rap.

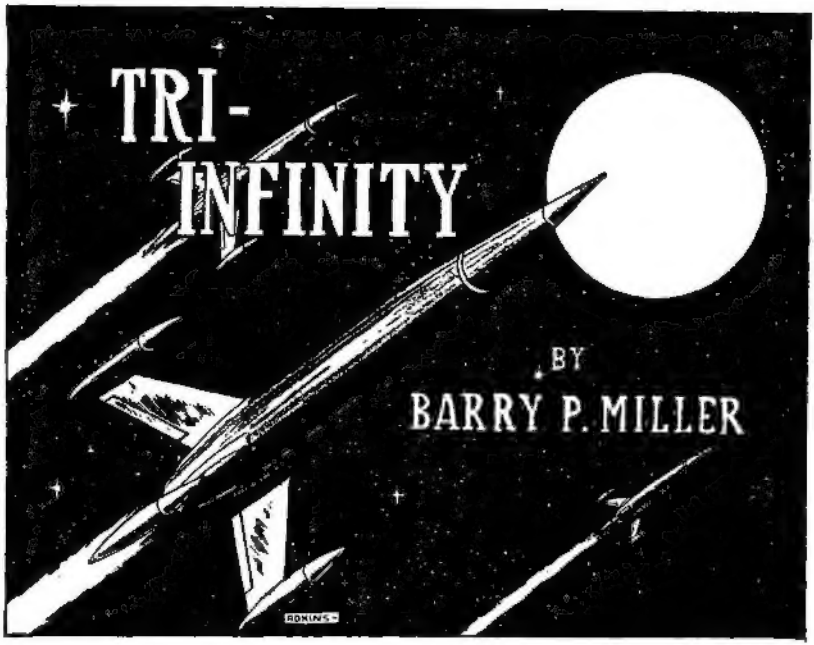


Illustration by Dan L. Adkins

HE stirred in his sleep; grunted and sat up in bed. Some vague premonition extended disturbing tentacles through his feelings. Wondering over his nebulous fear, he reluctantly flung back the warm covers and quietly planted his feet on the chill floor so as not to disturb the slumber of the incredible woman with whom he shared the bed. He walked over to where the French windows stood; luminous splotches in the blackness of his room.

He went out on the balcony, and the cold winds of night seduced his naked, powerful body. The first phosphorescent ramparts of the morning's fog were whispering with the wind across the panorama of the star-sprinkled skies, embracing the near high peaks in a white gossamer hug . . . but overhead the many suns still burned unobstructed and beautiful . . .

A streak, blindingly bright. Arcing down through the skies, meteor-brilliant and meteor-quick, and he thought it was a meteor until it proved itself terrifyingly otherwise . . .

Straight at him did it come, travelling at a flaming eighty miles per second . . .and he had time only to realize that it was a Moon shuttle in a death-plunge before his entire universe exploded into a vast dimension of pain and terror and concussive blue agony which fell away before a darkness infinite.

And his last despairing thought was:

"Doris! Oh, my God, DORIS!"

COMPLETE
40,000-WORD
NOVELET

THE CONCEPT OF IN-
FINITY IS
MAGNIFIED
THREEFOLD
IN THE MOST AMAZING NEW SCIENCE FIC-
TION TO COME ALONG IN A DECADE! HERE, AT LAST IS
A BRILLIANT NEW WRITER WHO HAS FORGED LIKE A GIANT AHEAD OF
ALL THE WRITERS OF HIS TIME, AND WHO NOW BRINGS US
IN THIS ASTONISHING STORY WHAT YOUR
EDITOR BE-
LIEVES IS
DESTINED TO
SET A NEW SF PACE.

"TERRIFIC!"
SAYS MR.
SCIENCE FICTION

II

Hard cobbles were beneath him - - hard and very cold. Snow whispered across them in dry and snakish whorls; licked with bitter chill at his nude body. He tried to understand what he was; where he was . . . and his perplexity grew.

All around him that cruel snow was falling; lazily spiralling out of a thick dark sky. He realized he had to do something or freeze, so he got to his feet - - wincing at the cold cobbles; so cold they burned.

"Ovarron strike me if the fellow isn't alive!"

"Alive appears he . . . but I imagined the poor chap was dead. Robbers, don't you think?"

"Arf, and I'd say it's likely. Poor fellow's dancing . . . cobbles must be devilishly cold tonight."

He spun toward the voices. Two men stood looking at him, both heavily bundled, standing beneath a flickering street light. As he looked at the flickering light, a strange unease came to him. He could have sworn it was a **candle . . .**

But then a minor gale whipped down the street, driving snow before it with cutting intensity. Whirling white clouds obscured everything for a few seconds, leaving him with the acute knowledge of his discomfort. Shakily he asked the two men, "Help me . . . "

"Blamed if the fellow can't speak.

Eh, Jacob? Think we ought to?"

"Should if you ask me. It isn't decent to leave a naked chap out in this."

"If you think it's okay . . . well, come on, Jacob." They came to him and supported him between them. They bore him down the street for about half a block then stopped in front of a house. The man named Jacob fumbled with a lock.

Before Jacob could carry him in, the miserably cold naked man grasped a hazy impression of an archaic structure with predominant Gothic-Irish lines. It was necessarily hazy because the only illumination came from the distant flickering streetlight. Then he was being hustled through an orange-lit doorway. Heat hit him like a wave and he crumpled into Jacob's arms, utterly exhausted.

And as the strange weariness washed like a tide over him, his battered mind found the energy to plaintively cry:

Where am I?

Who am I?

Lethargy sloughed from him like skin from a snake. For a while, he lay very still, eyes closed, trying to identify his surroundings. From what he could feel, he realized he was in a bed . . . only the linens felt coarse. Primitive was a better word.

He dared open his eyes after several minutes. What he saw neither placated nor agitated him . . . overhead, heavy hand-hewn rafters supported a drafty roof. They glimmered with a faint orange light . . suggestive of a fire somewhere beneath him. Wood burning touched his nostrils with its pungency . . . and along with it came a gentle susurrus of voices in low conversation.

He sat up in the semigloom; peered beyond his bed. He was on a platform which formed a half-attic for a large and crude room; below him was a dirt floor graced with a thick unsmoothed wooden table and clumsy wooden benches. A large clay-brick fireplace was the sole provider of illumination . . . and the orange-crimson light revealed plainly a group of people talking among each other by the benches.

It was with some wonder he gazed upon them. They seemed to be three men and a woman . . . and judging from their expressions, they were discussing a matter of great import. Even as he watched, they concluded their discussion . . . and the woman took a tray from the table and headed for a steep stairway which ascended to the platform that supported him. He watched as she came up, and the hot air from the fireplace filled the attic with a dry comfort. She saw that he was awake, and hesitated momentarily. With a gentle shrug, she came to the foot of his bed. She held out the tray, and he saw that it contained food. He looked at it.

"Well, stranger? You are hungry, I assume?"

Her voice was pleasant . . . not only pleasant; it was beautiful. It was an aural symphony even as she herself was a visual symphony. He found himself hazily wondering how he knew she was beautiful.

"Can't you speak, stranger?" Her tones were gentle.

He looked into her eyes. Even in the semigloom he could see that they were azure. A deep and vital azure which offered a glorious contrast to the shoulder-length flowing beauty of her brilliant blonde hair. His throat and lips had trouble forming the words, but they came out: "You - - are beautiful."

She looked at him oddly for a moment, then glanced away. "I suppose I should thank you, stranger. You seemed quite . . . sincere." Her gaze met his once again, and he saw

a twinkle of inner feeling shine through in it. "How about your name, friend? I don't want to go on calling you 'stranger' forever."

He tried to think of his name. It brought only a recollection of horror; of universes sundered and flaming and spilled into the maw of a night bigger than Infinity. He shivered.

The woman saw him shudder; saw the momentary bewildered agony which had flicked across his face. Setting the tray on a table near the foot of the bed, she came over to him. "Is anything wrong? I - - hope not."

He shook his head to clear his mind of that searing recollection. With great difficulty, he managed, "I - - don't - - know."

"Here, let me feel your forehead." Her palm, cool yet satiny-warm, fell softly on his brow. He was not feverish . . . but she did feel his cold sweat. Sympathetically she smoothed back a stray lock of his rich blonde hair, then brought the food to him. "Can you eat, friend?"

"I - - think - - so." With a hand which surprised him by its clumsy trembling, he grasped a spoon. The woman helped him sit up, and as she did so, she said, "I'm Ruthalyn. Ruthalyn Melville. Friends of mine found you in the middle of the street, naked, last night. You're lucky - - in an hour or so, you might have frozen. Don't you remember what happened? Robbers?"

Against his will, memory processes functioned. But all they could dredge up was that brief eternity when the cosmos had been rent by white madness. He cringed away from that reminiscence and concentrated on the food before him. He felt greatly troubled; troubled at his lack of identity and orientation. It was as if he had been birthed by that very searing chaos he remembered - - birthed to be hurled out of an abysmal womb to the cobbles of a winter-glazed street.

"I - - don't remember," he said at last. "There was only . . . light . . . so bright and hot and painful . . ." Again he trembled.

The woman named Ruthalyn massaged his back gently as he ate, thinking over what he'd said. At length, she asked, "Then you don't recall your name?"

"N - - no."

"I see. It's all right, friend. Things can be managed. Rest for the time being - - it'll help."

She left, taking the empty tray with her. And once again, he realized that she was very beautiful. He watched as she descended the stairs with a flowing grace; watched until she passed from his line of vision. He sighed and lay down in bed.

He was asleep in instants.

Dion Roland stood on the high balcony of his palace, his tremendous frame dwarfing the man who stood beside him. It was night, and fog was spilling storm-wild down the hills to the north and south, luminous in the light of a horned moon. Near the moonsilvered waters of the bay far below, the lights of New Cagliostro humbly twinkled. And from the ocean to the west the clear night wind sped above the fog to whip past the balcony.

"The kind of night you love, my Liege."

Roland folded his massive arms and turned his angry hazel gaze on the man before him. "In a way it is, Valin. Lonely and turbulent, the fog-wind screaming across the hills like the hell-nags of Ovarron. I like it because it represents me."

The man named Valin nodded; drew his bellying cloak tighter

around his thin shoulders. "Understandable, my Liege. But . . . " and his tones became a shade lower, " . . . we must concern ourselves with this report for the moment."

Roland sighed; folded his hands behind his back. "The report on an undefined release of energy?" he asked, toying with his robes.

Valin handed Roland a slip of paper. The huge man scanned it swiftly and shrugged. "I know. I read it before."

"But think, my Liege. The equivalent of two billion kilowatts of electrical discharge . . . "

"So?" Roland asked abruptly.

"But there must be an explanation. Suppose the idiots in Warlock I are trying to create confusion again . . . "

"Unlikely . . . impossible, in fact," said Roland flatly. "Take my word for it, Valin - - there's no concrete explanation for it. Only theoretical explanations . . . and I know how you detest those."

"But . . . but . . . as the report says, it occurred directly over Medea." Valin emphatically gestured at the lights of New Cagliostro, hugging the side of the night-ebony bay. "If it is a new weapon - - it surely has enough potential to flatten the whole town . . . "

Infinite patience streaking his tones, Roland said, "My dear Valin, I understand and appreciate your concern . . . and I repeat, you'll just have to take my word for it that nothing's amiss. You know yourself that Medea wasn't harmed . . . besides, Medea is a mere outlying mountain town. Valueless."

Valin glanced into his liege's grim countenance and swallowed. "But . . . well, if you say so, my Lord." Uneasily he left.

Roland returned his attention to the spectacle of the night. Fog embracing the woods at the base of the Ocean to the north; surging across the bay. And already was it embracing the woods at the base of the mountain which was the foundation for the Palace. A little sardonic smile quirked Roland's strong mouth as he remembered Valin's uneasiness. But there were certain things even an Advisor to Empire shouldn't know . . .

His glowering hazel eyes bored the skies, and his lips soundlessly voiced the phrase, **"A continuumal shift!"**

The fact that the continuums had been warped could be either insignificant . . . or tremendously significant.

Roland shrugged his immensely broad shoulders and let the chill whining wind bear the worry away as the forlorn beauty of the night swallowed him up more completely than any woman ever could. Excepting one, possibly . . .

Roland bowed his head in pain at the memory of the one woman he'd ever loved. Doris. Doris, who had been stolen from him on an ages-distant night when the entire broad sky had exploded into sunfire . . .

"How are you this morning, Rick?"

Ruthalyn was smiling, her features flushed with an inner excitement. Sunlight slanting through a crude window touched off the tawny golden glory of her hair. Rick . . . he liked very much that name she had given him . . . grinned back. "Fine. You're a wonderful balm for this poor soul, Ruthalyn."

"Flattery yet . . . but I like it, Rick." Her eyes sparkled.

His heart went out to her. In the three days he'd known her, he had come to like her very much. She was a wonderful cushion for his fearful heart; for his worried mind

which could see nothing but a blinding oblivion beyond those three days. She made everything seem right . . .

"Well, boy?" Rick glanced up and saw old Jacob in the doorway. Jacob's keen brown eyes were twinkling appreciatively. He pulled at his heavy black beard and rumbled, "Ruthalyn's a girl in a million, Ovarron strike me if I falsify. You should feel lucky, Rick, to have won her attentions away from the local swains."

Jacob's wife, Hulda, came into the room with a steaming breakfast. The plump and soft-spoken woman greeted Rick, and Jacob laughed boomingly. "I should envy you, lad. It seems that all my daughter and wife want out of life is to be near you." He thudded his portly bulk to a bench.

Rick thanked Hulda for the breakfast, and ate. His eyes roamed the primitive . . . he wondered why he thought of it as primitive . . . room, and he felt very much at home Wooden walls on all sides, broken by a few wavy windows; the heavy rafters overhead and the dirt floor beneath, warmed by the great clay-brick fireplace . . . it had in his mind become a home-concept. And the simple tranquility of his surroundings made a perfect home . . .

He felt Jacob's eyes on him. He liked Jacob. The portly man was Ruthalyn's foster father, he knew. Jacob lived with his wife, Hulda, in the big house which actually was an inn. Both Hulda and Ruthalyn helped him manage the tavern

"Would you like to help me today, Rick?" It was Ruthalyn; he knew at once because of her voice - - beauty borne on air.

"You probably know my answer."

"You'd love to?"

"I'd more than love to."

Her laughter was as delicate as the song of a mountain stream, yet subtly powerful. Vibrant. Rick loved to listen to it . . . then the melody was shattered by Jacob's deep bass. "Ovarron help me if you aren't a member of the family already, lad. Seems there's something about you - - childlike, I'd call it. Yes, Rick, a childlike innocence . . . despite your size. Take it as a compliment, not as an offense."

Rick grinned; got to his feet. His frame was very large; his shoulders very broad. Full six feet four he stood, weighing close to 250 pounds. Yet there wasn't a trace of flabbiness about him; he was solid with the grace, power and spirit of youth. "Thanks, Jacob," he acknowledged. Then to Ruthalyn: "What do you want me to do?"

"Use those great big muscles of yours," she answered gaily. "Papa Jacob needs some more meat for the inn; we'll go down to the butcher's in Medea and you can load the wagon."

"Then let's go," Rick said. It did not take him and Ruthalyn long to get into warmer clothes. Together they went outside, and the chill of the mountain winter was a pleasant nip at their faces. The horse-drawn wagon was all ready, and Rick clambered aboard wondering why he thought of the vehicle as crude. At the back of his mind was an indistinct memory of another vehicle - - a vehicle capable of travelling hundreds of miles an hour . . .

It was wiped out as Ruthalyn took up the reins and urged the horses off down the road. The road was a simple dirt track which led from a high pass between mountains down into the village of Medea. Jacob's inn was situated near the pass, so as the horses trotted down toward Medea, Rick had an opportunity to get an encompassing view.

The morning air was very, very clear; almost crystalline. It made the village of Medea, nestling in a flat, snow-cloaked valley surrounded by high shining peaks, seem closer than it really was. And to Rick, the feeling came that he had seen those snow-mantled mountains before, that the flat valley was as unfamiliar as . . .

As what? Home? He shook his head in perplexity, ran a hand through his rich yellow mane. His breath coming in vapory puffs, he put his feelings to Ruthalyn.

"Maybe," she contributed seriously, "you lived around here and were attacked; robbed of all your possessions. We'll see what the news in Medea is - - maybe we'll find out who you are." A sudden anxiety touched her tones. "If we do - - will you still be my friend, Rick?"

"I'll always be your friend . . . perhaps even a bit more. I couldn't help myself."

She smiled gratefully, and he once again drank of the beauty of her. Her naturally rosy features were all the more so under the nip of the chill air; her eyes were deeper and more delightfully blue than ever. Somehow, she was very familiar. He couldn't shrug off the powerful feeling that he had known her all his life. It had been an odd feeling, plaguing him almost from the very first instant he'd laid eyes upon her.

He laughed slightly to himself. In a way, he had known her all his life . . . because for him, his life had begun but three short days ago. Still he couldn't shake off the impression, and he told her of it.

She squinted at a distant crag; said loudly so as to be heard above the rumble of the wagon and the horses' heavy steaming breath, "You know, Rick, I feel somewhat the same with you - - almost as if Ovarron had predestined our meeting."

He accepted it at face value and said nothing more. They rode on to the village in silence, content simply to be near one another.

In the village, only a few people were abroad. For the most part they stayed in homes and taverns, protected from the bite of winter by cheerful fires. But the butcher shop Ruthalyn reined up in front of was open, and there she purchased three whole sides of beef. Rick carried two to the wagon, handling the two-hundred pound slabs of meat like a man might handle an infant. Tossing them easily into the wagon, he helped the butcher who was struggling with the third. Ruthalyn watched from the doorway, idly rubbing the small mole on the back of her left palm - - a habit of hers when she was intensely concentrating . . .

Her eyes flew startlingly wide, and she suddenly sprang for the wagon. She clutched Rick's arm so hard he grunted in surprise. "Get in!" she whispered vehemently.

He leaped into the wagon. Ruthalyn sprang into the driver's seat; frantically he scanned for the cause of her urgency . . .

Before the horses took off at a rapid gallop, he saw a procession coming down the street, not ten yards away. At its head a man strode, tall and golden-haired and very powerful . . .

For an incredible second, his glowering gaze met Rick's - - and Rick felt he had known that man for a million lifetimes . . .

Then was the fantastic instant ended . . . and the wagon was careening up the glazed street to the road leading to the pass. But Rick felt something profound had transpired; something which was intri-

cately involved with himself and his predicament. Could it be that he had seen the man responsible for the loss of his memory?

He thought until his mind hurt. It did not seem right . . . it seemed more like the man was an old, old friend . .

Then Ruthalyn's trembling voice shattered his thoughts. "Rick! That was the Sorcerer Supreme!"

III

Restlessness was a demon in Dion Roland. Like some huge stern animal, he paced his chambers. What disturbed him was the electrical discharge over the mountain village of Medea. It could be nothing but a continuumal warping . . .

At last he yielded to his inner feelings. He decided to go to Medea . . .

And in Medea he had a disappointment. Standing in the snow-locked streets of the town, he did not try to keep his rage from showing on his features. The flight from the Palace to Medea had taken two hours; now it appeared that valuable time might have been wasted.

"Confound it," he roared to Valin - - who was by his side - - "There isn't the slightest trace of an after-effect. Are you sure that energy-release occurred over this town?"

Valin swallowed nervously. "P-positive, my Liege. And if you have any idea what caused it . . . "

"Shut up, Valin!"

"As - - as you say, my Lord."

A whimpering little wind tumbled down from the distant crags to drive writhing whorls of snow along Medea's icy streets. Roland grimly surveyed the town, and sighed. "We might as well leave. To stay here avails nothing."

"Of course, Liege of mine."

So Roland started off down the street to where the Sorcerer Supreme's sacred conveyance rested. Roland snorted as he thought of the vehicle . . . a mere crude helicopter with a fancy name . . .

He rounded a corner, headed up an avenue . . .

And stopped - - thunderstruck.

Looking at him with puzzled eyes from a wagon was - - himself! No, not himself - - but someone very much like himself - -

The wagon careened away, leaving Roland speechless. The resemblance had been so amazing it'd jolted him to his very psychic foundations. He stood wondering until Valin timidly interrupted his thoughts. "Anything wrong, my Lord?"

"Eh? Oh . . . no, Valin. Just something odd."

"If you say so, Sire."

So they started off again, but Roland had lapsed into deep thought. Was it possible? Could that man he'd seen be . . .

It was impossible. Not even shifting continuums could account for it.

Vaguely troubled, he left.

Perplexed humans are often angry humans - - and being undeniably a human himself, Rick was no exception. "Why?" he roared, turning on a worried Ruthalyn. "Why am I here? Why all this stir over a fancily-dressed man? Why?"

Ruthalyn gave him a sympathetic little smile. "I - - can understand how you must feel, Rick. To lose all memory of your past life . . . but don't worry. Things can be managed."

"Perhaps - - but what is it all about? This hokum over Ovarron... this balderdash concerning a Sorcerer Supreme - - I have a right to know!"

"Of course, Rick," stout Jacob placated boomingly. "But . . . well,

you see, we - - ah - - assumed you knew of such things. Forgive us, for we knew not how much you had forgotten."

Accepting Jacob's argument, but still feeling troubled, Rick sat down on a wooden bench. "Okay...really, it is I who should ask to be forgiven- -because of my outburst. But somewhy..." His face screwed up in despairing concentration, "... things don't seem right. It's as... as if- -I'm- -misplaced."

"Poor Rick," Ruthalyn sympathized.

Rick gave a weak little grin. "Well? The story - - let me have it, if you please. Where am I; who is Ovarron; who is the Sorcerer Supreme? In general, paint the politico-economic setup of this country. Maybe," and his voice grew hopeful, "it will help me orient myself."

"Perhaps," murmured Ruthalyn, meeting Rick's serious blue gaze. "All right, Rick. I'll try. To begin with . . . "

And she talked, fingering her almost invisibly small mole absently. "The Alchemists - - a group of filthy sophistic hypocrites - - hold a nearly total power over Satania ..."

Rick interrupted: "Where is Satania? This country?"

Ruthalyn turned to Jacob; the old man tugged at his beard and rumbled. "Dear Ruthalyn, I think that Rick craves a history lesson as well. Right, lad?"

Rick's features lit up in anticipation. "Exactly! A history lesson! Should have said so myself."

Ruthalyn sighed. "You men! Always so demanding!" But her eyes twinkled as she said it, and her tones were warm. And she lectured, making herself concise, assuring herself Rick missed not a single point; a single detail...

In A.D. 161, Marcus Aurelius succeeded Titus Aurelius Antoninus as Emperor of Rome. Marcus Aurelius' career was long and honorable; he fought a successful war with the Parthians and returned to Rome with his victorious army in A.D. 166. Rome had never been in better spirits - - and when the Germanic tribes under Marcomanni tried to cross the Danube in 167, Rome was at her peak of power. (Rick, upon hearing this, felt vaguely dissatisfied. In the back of his mind there lurked the memory of a terrible plague...)

Marcus Aurelius effortlessly drove back the invaders and went on to push the Romanic frontiers outward. In 170, he conquered Bohemia; in 175, his armies left England and began claiming the Norselands. Under him, Rome attained her utmost pinnacle of might. And following the tradition of the Antonines - - the Good Emperors - - he chose a successor.

In a way, the successor Marcus Aurelius chose represented that Emperor's best decision and worst mistake For the man who donned the Imperial Purple in A.D. 185 was a political and military genius, surpassing even Alexander the Great in sheer shrewdness. What Marcus Aurelius knew not was that this man- -none ever learned his true name- -was a member of the Cult of Dis. Dis, the god of darkness, was his deity. The black arts he practiced and adored.

As it was, he had himself recognized as Plutus Caesar, his name being a not-so-subtle allusion to the Greeks' Pluto. And with his unsurpassed genius, he saw in the Christians a future threat to Empire. For he saw in the past rulings of Trojan and Hadrian concerning the Christians gaping flaws. They merely made it illegal to be a Christian.

Other than this, little action was taken against them.

As a result, their following grew. Plutus Caesar realized he'd have to kill this new religion in the bud. And he proceeded to do so.

There followed a reign of terror and Titanic pogroms. Huge squads of Empire soldiers scoured all Italy for Christians, killing each and every man, woman and child who was connected with the forbidden religion--even if only by the merest wild rumor.

For twenty years this purge lasted, and all Rome and her dominions were scoured clean of Christians. The penalty for any member of the public who made an allusion to Christ was death. And it was about then that Plutus Caesar began to get ambitious.

He studied the great conquests made by Alexander some hundreds of years before. He studied his own Empire's military history. He pored over the Carthaginian conquests. And at last he felt himself ready for the greatest task of all his life... the conquest of the world.

In A.D 207, he set out. He subjugated all Persia; all Africa; the whole Mediterranean area...his legions marched into Russia, into China...picking up and recruiting men on the way...a force of nearly twenty-four million men invaded the dominions of the Khan...

The destruction wrought was unbelievable. The existing dynasty in China crumbled. The first glimmerings of a Czarist regime in Russia were smothered. Plutus Caesar found himself lord of both Asia minor and major; Africa; the Mediterranean, and all Europe. Only India was still offering resistance--and rapidly weakening resistance, at that. All this had been accomplished in twenty-three years. Plutus Caesar, then sixty-seven, ordered that there should be but one religion on all Earth -- the worship of Dis-Pluto.

And this proved to be the major mistake of his career. Men may submit to an overlordship--but men will fight and fight hard for their beliefs. Especially was this true of Buddhist-Taoist China and the Hindus of India. Nevertheless, Plutus Caesar might have been able to subjugate them...but he never had the chance. For in A.D. 231, he died.

His place was taken over by another member of the cult of Dis, and that fellow ordered that the deceased Caesar's plans were to be carried out.

What followed was a half-century of hell. A superb leader rose among the Mongols and managed to make an ally out of India. Tatar hordes swept in an irresistible wave toward Rome. The Roman legions managed to hold them off at last on a border stretching from the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea down Armenia, Assyria, and the frontiers of ancient Syria, Judea, and new Arabia Petraea, then along the eastern shores of the Red Sea all the way down to the Indian Ocean.

Yet in the meantime, all Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, and pagan cults were either exterminated or forced to become members of the Cult of Dis.

In A.D. 285, friction wore away and the two vast empires uneasily regarded one another. Only three major religions were left in the world--Buddhism, Taoism, and the worship of Dis-Pluto.

In the meantime, however, England was slowly severing her ties with Empire. Once nearly all Roman, nationalism was suffering a rebirth. English nationalism. Unknown to the high lords, a new cult

had sprung up in England. . .the cult of the Alchemists. The Alchemists patterned their doctrines so closely after those of the cult of Dis that no hue and cry was raised. They remained a select group, sending emissaries out to worm their way high into the ranks of Empire. It was a slow business and only because of a monumental patience were the leaders of the Cult and their successors and the successors of their successors able to wait out the three hundred and fifty years it took for the first Alchemist to become Emperor. Three hundred and fifty years in which "royal families" were established, maintained, and shoved up the power-scale by blackmail, subterfuge and profound trickery. This first Alchemic Emperor, Cagliostro I, took the robes of his office in A.D. 634, and set into motion another incredibly farsighted plan originated by the Alchemic leaders. It was a very slow but very irresistible conversion of the Plutonian doctrines to the Alchemic covenants. So slow as to be unnoticed. So slow it took one and a half centuries to halfway effect the change. Yet the effects were pronounced- -most of the Empire spoke the English language; all of the Empire was oblivious to the change in their old faith. But in 787, when Cagliostro II took office as Emperor, he found he could not constrain himself.

Blasting traditions like mad, he blasted also the tempers of the devout followers of the semi-Plutonian precedents. Civil war ensued- -mainly it was a conflict between the Alchemists and Rome itself, for Rome was the last stronghold of the actual leaders of the cult of Dis-Pluto.

The Cult was annihilated after five years of strife, and Cagliostro II inaugurated truly radical changes. He shattered the halfbreed Alchemic-Plutonian covenants and converted the Empire- -almost singlehandedly- -to full obesiance toward the Alchemic doctrines in their entirety.

This meant the erecting of institutions which were termed the Palaces of the Seekers of Knowledge. These institutions were established all throughout the Empire, and they were the finest schools in the whole world. Many and marvelous were the things they taught, and especially was this true along scientific lines. All who were mentally eager and mentally eligible were urged to join. Students flocked in by the thousands. And the Alchemic doctrines were satisfied - - for they were little more than a decree that all capable men should use their capabilities as best they can. It was a surprisingly mature concept, and it was well-accepted all throughout the Empire.

And even the Eastern Empire liked the idea. Cagliostro II had arranged for a conference with the Khan and had made it clear that he wished peace between Alchemic Rome and Buddhist-Taoist China. He proposed that institutions be established throughout the Mongolian and Indian lands. And after many misgivings, the Khan consented.

Thus were Palaces of the Seekers of Knowledge erected in China and India, and affairs went smoothly for over a millennium. During the more than one thousand years of peace, the Alchemic sciences mounted to astounding pinnacles. The principle of electricity was discovered; the functionings and uses of steam; the effective use of gunpowder; the fine arts of grinding lenses- -all those and scores of other things which were applied well

to the existing civilizations. It appeared as if there would truly be a Golden Future for Earth . . . when the utterly idiotic, utterly infantile and utterly fatal Colonial Dispute arose.

For long had it been known that two vast continents existed west of Alchemic Rome, inhabited by red men. And for long had both Alchemic Rome and Khan-China been settling on them . . . until the day when a Chinese colony contested Roman colonial rights on the eastern coast of the northern continent. Rome got ugly about it and offered an ultimatum to the Kahn to withdraw that particular colony . . . and the Kahn politely refused. Thus nationalism and racism, supposedly-dead concepts, flared into new life. Alchemic science turned the new wars into fearsome things.

Ships armored, steam-driven and terribly powerful plied the seas. Great growling vehicles thundered across the land. Guns hurled explosive shells scores of miles. Cities vanished in clouds of concussive flame. Gases rolled across the countryside and men crumpled to the earth, their life rupturing away.

The gods of old were cried to--uselessly. So new gods were born in Chaos, and greatest of these was Ovarron. For it was Ovarron who created civil disorder in the lands of the Mongols which devastated hundreds of millions; Ovarron it was who cracked Rome asunder with internal strife and brought the entire Empire down upon itself in flaming destruction. Ovarron, Protector of the nation of Satania, former offspring of the colonies of Alchemic Rome.

A bare hundred and fifty years past, in A.D. 1900, Satania had taken desolate eminence as the mightiest nation in the world. Shattered were the lands and peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere. Utterly devastated was Imperial Alchemic Rome from her first frontier to her last. There remained only cities crumbling where whining snow whispered among the rubble to the north and the bitter sands of human created deserts did the same with the ruins to the south. What few survivors there were could not be graced with the term savage... they were beasts.

Only Satania survived--and her southern sisters, Warlocks I and II. But the heathens of the Warlocks worshipped the atavistic Plutonians; listened not to the Word of Ovarron. Between the three nations rivalry existed, but not war. They were afraid of war. The spreading deserts of the Eastern Hemisphere in which lay the skeletons of men and cities were grim reminders of the wages of battle. Matters became static, the Sorcerer Supreme of Satania on chill but cordial terms with the two Warlock Supremes of the lands of their namesake. Both Satania and the Warlocks encouraged Alchemic researches so they might have technological superiority in case war did break loose.

And ultimately, in Satania, the Alchemists became the greatest power in the land. They were a small band, and although well-educated, they were a far cry from their forebears who had managed Alchemic Rome. Also, in their power they wanted luxury. And they got it.

Private palaces, concubines, slaves . . . each Alchemist was a king. And there were no more Palaces of the Seekers of Knowledge--the Alchemists realized when they had a good thing, so they kept their numbers limited. And it was like that to the present day, the Alchemists the

Lords of Satania with their many luxuries and their exclusive Alchemic Hospital; the Sorcerer Supreme their organizer.

Ruthalyn concluded bitterly, "The structure of Satania should be plain to you now, Rick. And I feel hurt because our empire is degenerating. Degenerating as all aristocracies have done and will do."

Rick nodded vaguely; rubbed his chin. He had hardly heard her last words. All throughout her explanations, one factor had been agonizingly predominant in him. And that was the sense of **wrongness.**

He had felt a slight twinge of familiarity at the mention of Marcus Aurelius...a vague memory-fragment concerning a literary piece called **The Meditations.** Beyond that all was strangeness. It bothered him terribly and resisted his efforts to analyze it. In desperation he turned to the only method on hand by which he might forget--Ruthalyn.

Outside the sun was setting. Inside the fire warmly blazed; the scene was very warm and comfortable. Jacob thought so. Heaving his portly bulk to his feet, he grinned at Rick and said, "Plain it is to me you wish to be alone with Ruthalyn . . . what say, lad, I get you some ale?"

"Eh?" Rick found himself also grinning. "Splendid, Jacob."

Ruthalyn smiled dreamily, still caressing the tiny crescent mole. But after Jacob left, she grew serious "Something was bothering you, Rick. What was it--if you want to tell me?"

"Something was," he slowly admitted. "It has to do with what you've told me--somewhy, I can't seem to...fit it in."

"How do you mean?"

He shrugged. "It's hard to say. It's like--well, like a feeling of total disorientation. It is very disturbing."

Her blue eyes were keen yet understanding. "So you turn to me?"

He nodded. "I couldn't really help myself. I--like you very much, Ruthalyn. You've been so patient and kind with me--a stranger."

Her eyes smiled. "I like you too, Rick. You intrigue me."

"Thanks. I only hope I can always intrigue you."

She smoothed her golden hair. "Maybe you can, Ricky. I like you a lot."

"Ricky? Sounds cute..."

Jacob had returned with two foaming mugs of ale. He set them before the couple and winked at Rick. "Be happy, my children." Then he left.

Rick sipped at his ale and mused, "Jacob is very kind. Even more so, considering that you're his adopted daughter."

Ruthalyn gazed somberly into the flames. "I never did find out who my true parents were. Jacob says he found me half-dead in the wintry streets of Medea about nineteen years ago. He says I couldn't have been more than a few weeks old at the time His own wife, Hulda, had just suffered a miscarriage and her breasts were full, so he took me home. Jacob thinks my mother may have been...well, a woman of easy virtue. But he tells me to think of Hulda as my real mother. It was she who nursed me back to health from her own breast."

"I think I understand. Nevertheless, your birth doesn't reflect upon you at all, Ruthalyn."

The smile she gave him was tender. "Thanks, Ricky."

So for the rest of the evening they exchanged happy nonsense, and Rick became aware of a growing bond between himself and Ruthalyn.

a bond which had first been friendship--but was being forged into something else.

Something great and good which would fill the odd yearning emptiness in him.

Dion Roland surveyed the woman before him. Young. Vivacious. Vehement. Passionate. She was trembling. With desire.

He snarled. "Who sent you here?"

It jolted her to her feet. "Oh--I--I--it was Valin, my Lord."

"Then begone. Scram. Git. Tell Valin to keep his idiotic nose out of certain of my affairs. And tell him that if he tries another such puerile trick, Satania will get a new Advisor to Empire."

She pouted--then a sly light stole into her eyes. "Valin or not...I like you, my Liege."

Immobile as some monolithic tower, Roland fastened his brooding hazel gaze on her. The sly light died in her eyes. She swallowed, hung her head. With infinite patience, Roland rumbled, "You may leave."

She left.

Roland hunched his immense shoulders and strode out to the balcony. The night was moonless, but the stars burned. There was no fog either. The ocean was a gulf of darkness; without beginning and without end.

A choking sensation welled in Roland's throat. "Doris," he murmured. "Doris."

The fathomless ebon ocean mocked him. It had a counterpart in him, a counterpart even vaster and blacker which Doris had torn.

He shook his great frame; looked at the lost lights of New Cagliostro. He cursed the atavistic name; the atavistic setup. Soundlessly he blasted all the cruel fates which had cast him into his predicament. Twenty years had passed since that hellish night when all the heavens had thundered open in flaming dissolution, hurling him through a wall of continuums. Twenty horrible years without Doris.

He had no idea what had precipitated him into an alternate universe But whatever it was, he hated it with all his soul. It had rent him from a tranquil world serenely governed by the Triplanetary Federation. It had torn him from cities of glass and metal and loveliness; from people graceful and machines beautiful. It had torn him from intelligence to barbarianism; to a world in which the Christians had been slaughtered by a powerful Cult of Darkness; to a world which had suffered spasmodic war under an expanding Roman Empire and Asiatic Kingdom. Primitive war, admittedly, but horribly thorough.

Most painful of all, for him there was no return. For two reasons:

First: he hadn't the slightest idea how to construct a vehicle to span continuums.

Second: It was madness to imagine he could find the continuum rightfully his. The odds were infinity to one against him. Not only infinity--but infinity to the infinite power. The reasons were quite simple.

He, Dion Roland, was in a peculiar position. He was on Earth, an Earth which was his yet which was not his. He was on an Earth which existed in the same space and the same time as his own, yet he could not go from one to another. A barrier separated him from the Earth rightfully his. A barrier which would be forever outside human understanding. Call it-the fifth dimension. Call it a Function of Probability. A Function of Probability which satisfied a certain

odd form of vacuum...

Take any object in any universe. An electron or a Leviathan; a meson or a man. The object- -whatever it may be; microcosmic or macrocosmic, animate or inanimate - - has an infinitude of possible "courses of action". But it can fulfill only one.

This left a vacuum of a very peculiar kind. Nature strives to fill a vacuum; the infinity of paths left by an object constitute a certain kind of vacuum; Ergo, it must be filled.

And this was achieved by a certain process beyond any human science; some incomprehensible action of fifth-dimensional (?) warpings enabling an infinity of infinite universes to exist in the same space at the same time, much in the same way that an infinite two-dimensional plane can exist in an infinite three-dimensional volume at the same time. Thus everything which could possibly happen happened. Somewhere-when, Lincoln wasn't assassinated. Somewhere-when, the Dinosaurs are still kings of Earth. Somewhere-when, Earth was never born. Somehow, Dion Roland managed to get kicked out of his own somewhere-when.

All this the child of some incredible (?) Function of Probability.

And in the face of that, Man was a fraction of an atom in a fraction of a millisecond- -yet even he in his course of events creates continuums numberless.

It was hopeless. There were an infinity of Dorises. There were Dion Rolands beyond imagination. Futile, futile, hopes of mine...it droned through his mind and feelings. And the terrible immensity of it all crushed him to his soul.

But not for long. With an effort, he shrugged off the despairing burden and concentrated on the events of the day. He thought of the palace slave girl Valin had sent. Desirable, desirable- -he felt the tremendous cry of his instincts, but repressed them.

In some vague manner he was afraid of offending Doris. He had idolized her- -he admitted it to himself- -and now it was killing him. Psychically.

He wrenched his mind from those channels; concentrated on the really disturbing factor which had streaked his life for the past few days It was the problem of the tremendous electrical discharge over the mountain village of Medea. It troubled him because it was in Medea that he himself had first arrived. Whatever cruel god had smashed him across the continuums had precipitated him to the streets of Medea. Twenty long years ago, it had been. It was, he felt, a continuumal gap...could be nothing but another hapless human like himself hurled from his familiar universe. He felt it strongly because twenty years before, perfectly coincident with his appearance in Medea, a stupendous electrical discharge had occurred over the town.

Roland smiled wryly as he remembered that. He hadn't found out about it until years afterwards...not until he'd bulldozed his way to his present status as Sorcerer Supreme of Satania. His prodigious knowledge of science had struck the Alchemists speechless; he had been instantly admitted to their sacred ranks. And his superior training in politics and psychology had enabled him to climb to the exalted position of Sorcerer Supreme only seven short years after his arrival. And as Sorcerer Supreme, he'd had access to all the records of the Alchemists.

Yes, he'd done much toward ad-

vancing Satania. They'd had crude gasoline engines when he arrived; already, he'd been able to show them how to make primitive helicopters and propeller planes. Before that, he'd set them on the road to a comprehensive organic chemistry. Before that ...

Before that there was Medea. How well he recalled how he had been found by Sylvia, the daughter of an innkeeper... his face twisted in pain as he unwillingly remembered the indiscretion he'd committed against Doris with Sylvia. He had been dazed by his experience, and Sylvia had been so very beautiful--a night of flame and passion; Sylvia with love-burning body had stood before him, all perfection crowned with roseate shimmering from the fireplace... then the bed and a confused memory of lips searing and an explosion of passion and sensation which had left nothing but ecstatic blackness until the grim gray dawn.

And he had fled. No more Sylvia; only his insane idolizing of Doris. He knew he was insane to cling by her so much--but he knew he could never help himself. Doris--she had been one of his strongest mental links with the continuum which was his own. She whom he had so dearly and deeply loved. He could never, would never relinquish her memory so cherished

He drew in his swirling thoughts. The fact still remained that something had happened in or over Medea a few days past, and whatever it was its effects corresponded closely with what had happened when he had been pitched from his own universe. So closely that he could think of it only as a continuumal shift akin to the one of his own time.

But who was the unlucky fellow now?

For an instant, his odd experience in Medea came to him. The fellow in the wagon he'd seen that morning--the fellow who was so incredibly familiar--could it have been him?

On second thought, he dismissed it. It was too improbable. But still, something might have happened...

Decision crystallized. Tomorrow he would send agents to Medea to inquire around town if anything unusual had happened--especially if someone had suddenly appeared apparently from nowhere.

The turbulence of his thoughts somewhat calmed, Dion Roland stood quietly on his balcony, revelling in the heavy chill wind pouring in from the ocean to the west. He stood that way for a long time, and the black night wheeled slowly on toward its termination, and far below, the lights of New Cagliostro winked out one by one like a dying galaxy.

IV

Night. Clouds screamed with the wind past the rending crags surrounding Medea; the vehement breeze swallowed the chill of the high snowfields and flung it with shrieking force at Jacob's inn by the pass. The walls creaked and groaned--but staved off the cold with the enthusiastic support of several roaring blazes

In a back room, however, things were not so cheery. Jacob was relaxing in a huge crude armchair, Hulda rocking near him. Rick was nervously handling a mug of ale and glancing from Ruthalyn to Jacob and back again.

Jacob was smoking a long-stemmed pipe, and about him was a concerned air. He turned his keen brown eyes on Rick and boomed, "Rick, lad, will you tell me one thing?"

"Ask it, Jacob. I'll do my best to

answer."

Jacob sighed, took a long drag on his pipe. Blowing aromatic blue smoke, he asked, "Just how far can I trust you, my lad?"

The question puzzled Rick. "Why...well, Jacob, of one thing I am very sure--and that is: As I now am, my loyalty lies wholly with you and Hulda and Ruthalyn."

Jacob tugged at his beard and took a deep breath. "Thank you, Rick. I am very grateful for this if you are sincere. And now may I ask another thing of you? What I am going to ask will mean much from you. It will also mean considerable responsibility for both you and me. Game, lad?"

Rick glanced at Ruthalyn; she solemnly nodded. He took a slow pull at his ale and returned his focus to Jacob. "All right," he said at length. "What is it?"

"Well..." Jacob began with considerable thought, "It's a little hard to put. Not so hard at that, maybe, but here it is:

"With me, my wife, and Ruthalyn--and many others--there runs a strong feeling of dissatisfaction. This feeling is ours because of the Sorcerer Supreme and his Council of Alchemists.

"As you already know, the Socerer Supreme represents the Ultimate Lord of Satania, with the Council of Alchemists a sort of conclave of the Lesser Lords of Satania. The principle of our government is what gives us our discontent. We are not free.

"We are subject to a hereditary 'dynasty'. And those of the Council of Alchemists annually overawe the population of Satania with exhibitions of 'dark powers' which are really little more than well-staged acts using some basic chemical and physical techniques. They would have us believe that we are little more than rubble.

"And they demand for themselves exorbiant privileges--concubines, private palaces, slaves, and many other related things To us it is not fair; to the concubines and slaves it is not fair. We want to put an end to it.

"All that the Alchemists can truly be commended for is the fact that they do run Satania very efficiently as a nation; they watch always the welfare of Satania--this at the expense of individual liberty. Yet, no matter how well they manage Satania, it does not justify their use of concubines nor their keeping the populace in ignorance.

"Some of the populace have fortunately penetrated the deception. We do not like it. We have formed an organization--an underground one--christened the Truthseekers. We intend to stage a revolution which **will** unseat the Alchemists but **will not** precipitate Satania into a ripe anarchic chaos for the dictators of Warlocks I and II to take over.

"What I ask of you, Rick, is: Will you, under my authority, join the Truthseekers and remain faithful to them until the day you die? I have some perfectly understandable qualms about asking this of you--but Ruthalyn has begged me to do it. She trusts you. Do not break it."

Rick sat very still, thinking. Ruthalyn, eyes bright, watched him. Jacob's heavy breathing could be heard above the crackle of the flames. At length, Rick asked, "Before I decide. Jacob, I want to ask one thing of you."

"It is your privilege."

"Very well. What I want to know is how the Seekers of Truth came to be in the first place. It appears to me that the Sorcerer Supreme and his Council should realize when they have a good thing in their hands.

Surely they wouldn't want to spoil it- -it escapes me how the 'common folk' should come to know of the deception."

Jacob shrugged. "Simple. Consider, Rick, the probability that some of the Alchemists might be more humane than their brothers... to the extent of leaving Alchemic society. If anyone, it would be they who would plan such a rebellion."

"And Jacob should realize that best of all," cut in Ruthalyn, "because he himself is one of the rebellious Alchemists. He and others before him have been planning for the last half-century. The time and circumstances must be **right.**"

Rick rubbed his chin in contemplation; finally sighed. "All right, Jacob. With full loyalty I join you. Although I haven't heard the case for the Sorcerer Supreme and his council. I am sure I can trust you. What you have done for me only makes my feelings firmer."

Jacob grunted with relief. "I thank you very much, Rick. Tomorrow evening I'll introduce you to a few others of the Truthseekers. I myself am what you might call a 'general' of a certain division of Truthseekers.

"I have but one thing to caution you of. And that is: Watch your tongue! The Alchemists undoubtedly know of us- -and will destroy us if they can because we threaten their position. Their agents are everywhere. Maybe one sleeps here even tonight."

Rick signified understanding. "It is very clear. I'm sure I can be trusted, Jacob."

"I think so too," came Jacob's reassuring answer.

Ruthalyn came gracefully over to Rick's side. She caught his chin in her palms and murmured, "Thanks, Ricky." And then her lips were on his.

Those lips so tender and beautiful on his own exploded something in him. His arms went around her convulsively and he was aware of a million sensations at once. Ruthalyn's aroma; flower-delicate...the soft firmness of her body, the silken glory of her hair. They consumed him and it was with regret he felt her pull free. She looked at him, face flushed, and her tones were vibrant: "I can almost imagine you're sincere, Ricky."

"I am."

"If anything, I'm glad you are."

And it was then that Rick realized he loved Ruthalyn. Really loved her- -with a desperation he couldn't understand. "Would- -you- -like to take a walk with me?" he asked uneasily.

"I'd love to Ricky."

Arm in arm, they left, and Jacob's queerly soft chuckles followed them into the gale-racked night.

It did not take Dion Roland's agents long to cover the news of Rick's appearance in Medea and bring it to their Lord. Roland felt a slight odd twinge of apprenhension as he scanned the news- -but acted fast. "Fetch him!" he commanded.

So they left.

Rick was washing dishes. He was enormously happy. His thoughts revolved time and time again to the happenings of the previous night. Especially did they center about Ruthalyn. He sighed contentedly as he remembered the walk he'd taken with her...how they had sat together on a frozen snowbank revelling in the glory of the night...how it had been sheer ecstasy for him merely to be near her. He had told her as much- -and the tears had welled shining in her eyes. "Oh Rick- -Ricky- -I don't know what to say, really..."

"I guess there's nothing to say."

"Maybe not--but, Ricky, it's all so strange to me. My feelings, I mean. I seem to know you so very well--almost like a brother or--"

"A father?"

"Don't be silly, Ricky. . .but yes, I do like you. Maybe I even love you. It's too soon to tell."

"But I love you. I know I do."

"Do you? Will you, if your memory returns?"

"I will. Always and forever."

Something like a shudder had passed through her. "If only I could be sure. . .oh, Ricky, you must understand my position."

"I can't help not to."

"Thanks. Maybe I do love you. Kiss me, Ricky."

He had done so with pleasure, and the night had become supremely bright for a second-eternity. And again she had engulfed him; all sweet aroma and firmsoft lips in magnificent contrast with the chill gale of the mountain night. And she had murmured, "Ricky beloved. . ."

It had unlocked glory in him before the gale cast it away.

So it was: Rick happily washing dishes as a favor to Jacob, his thoughts gyrating around the walk with Ruthalyn, when three agents of the Sorcerers Supreme stomped snow from their boots in the inn's reception hall. An anxious Jacob hurried up to them. Wringing his hands, he asked, "What will it be, my sires?"

"We hear you picked up a fellow from the streets some days ago."

"That I did, my Sires. What do you wish with him?"

"Nothing. The Sorcerer Supreme desires to see him."

Jacob's eyes widened, stunned--then narrowed. "Then you have come to take him?"

"Correct. Where is he?"

Jacob hesitated, undecided whether to lie or tell the truth. He at last sighed. "In the kitchen, Sires. He is washing dishes."

Faces grim, the three Agents headed for the kitchen. A startled-eyed Ruthalyn ran up to Jacob. "Papa Jacob! What do they want?"

"Rick. "

"Oh. . .Ooohh." And Jacob inwardly winced at the uneasiness in his adopted daughter's voice.

Rick looked up at the brusque entrance of the three Agents. His eyes spat fire. "What do you want?"

"You. His Magical Majesty, Dion Roland, the Sorcerer Supreme of Satania desires an audience with you."

"Why?"

"That is not for us to say. You are to come with us."

"Says who?"

"Says His Magical Majesty."

"Some other time."

"Sorry, but he desires a hearing today. You are to come with us."

"I will not." Anger was beginning to grow in Rick--and not a little perplexity.

"Please, sir, do not compel us to use force. . ."

Snarling, Rick backed away.

They charged.

What they got they hardly expected. One of them went down, shattered teeth spouting from a bloodied mess of a face The remaining two found themselves confronted with a human become demon who lashed out with insanely powerful blows. Rick was far from a weakling; his gigantic frame more than justified his height and his thews were solid as steel.

But the agents were no weaklings either. Nor were they stupid; one of them grabbed an empty crock and flung it brutally. It shattered against

Rick's temple and he went down under a hail of pummelling fists. Bleeding from his ugly wound, he was carried out of the kitchen by two extremely battered agents.

Jacob and Ruthalyn had heard the struggle. Afraid to do anything, they waited--but when Rick was unceremoniously hauled out of the kitchen, Ruthalyn gave a little cry and flung herself at the two men. Extremely irritated over Rick's powerful resistance, they were in no mood for more. Ruthalyn went down under a cruel blow to her jaw...

And that proved to be a bit too much for Jacob.

Roaring like an angry bull, he hurled a stool at one of the men. It shattered his arm and he went to his knees howling. The last man dropped Rick, growled, and launched himself at Jacob. The innkeeper put up a magnificent fight for a man of his age...but was hopelessly outclassed. He crumpled before a relentless blow to the temple.

The remaining Agent scowled at the crowd which had gathered. It milled apprehensively, wholeheartedly afraid. The Agent hauled Rick's unconscious form to a helicopter waiting outside and securely bound him. Returning to the inn, he revived his two fellows and they accompanied him back to the helicopter, heartily cursing. The Agent's eye caught Ruthalyn's limp form, and he saw that she was beautiful. "A lusty slave," he growled to himself, "For Valin or His Magical Majesty. Serves the bitch right." He picked her up and cast her across his shoulder.

With his badly beaten men, he took the helicopter up and drove through cloudless skies westwards to the Palace of the Sorcerer Supreme and New Cagliostro.

"Three Agents of yours to see you, my Lord."

Roland turned slowly; faced Valin. "Have them sent in."

"They have two captives, Liege of mine."

"So I thought. Have them sent in also."

"If such is your will." Valin hurried off in a nervous shuffle.

Roland was left alone in his private chambers. He paced the polished floor tirelessly like some great grim beast. Inside him, however, was a tumult as he thought of the soon-to come encounter. What continuum did the man come from? Perhaps...oh such a wild hope...his own?

Doris.

Blinding skies; memory of pain. Shrugged away and dissolved. Roland calmed his inner trembling and mentally steeled himself for the meeting which sent perverse spasms of anticipation and dread up his spine. So terribly much might result from it...

Yet he realized he might also get a huge disappointment. Such as if the man was a mere barbarian, believing "spirits" had transported him to a new world.

There was the sound of feet approaching down the hallway. He turned; waited for the group to enter his chambers. He didn't have to wait long.

He recognized one of his Agents. The fellow, followed by five palace guards, was escorting a tall and golden-haired and grim-faced man. By the man's side strode a woman--rounded yet supple, her muscles of fluid strong grace. The procession halted ten feet from Roland. The Agent stepped forward, bowed. "The man you requested, my Lord. He is yours, as is the woman. She put up resistance; as punishment, she

should be appointed as a palace slave."

Roland nodded, his face expressionless. "Well done. Tonight you shall get a commission. You may leave."

"If such is your desire, my Liege." He left.

Once again Roland turned his attention to Rick. His mind struggled hard with itself. The resemblance between himself and Rick was so pronounced as to suggest identical twins. Rick was perfectly as tall, exactly as broad as Roland...

But Rick was younger. At least twenty years younger. Roland swallowed and said, "Will you allow me to apologize for the treatment you were given?"

Rick glowered. "It will take a lot of apologizing."

Roland sighed. "I suppose so. Tell me one thing: Will you behave yourself if I send the guards away?"

"I really have no choice."

Roland shrugged. "You may leave," he told the guards. He ordered drinks through a palace servant then gestured to some seats. "Be seated if you wish. You too, Miss."

Rick stood for an indecisive moment then sat. Ruthalyn took a seat next to his and turned angry eyes on Roland. The Sorcerer Supreme was clothed in the resplendent uniform of his office and a broad long cape, dark-blue with gold embroidery, swirled from his massive shoulders. He was conscious of the torn contrast between himself and his guests. He chose not to mention it; said, "You two probably know by now who I am."

"Undeniably," Ruthalyn sneered.

"Please do not think of me like that. I hadn't expected that you might not want to come; I assure you I hadn't intended for my men to treat you as they did. And as for this business about your becoming a palace slave, Miss, forget it." Concentrating on Rick, he said, "You are reported to have appeared naked in the streets of Medea about a week ago. Is this true, good fellow?"

Rick looked at Roland penetratingly. Deep inside himself, Rick too was stricken with his resemblance to the Sorcerer Supreme, and he was hard-put to restrain from commenting on it. At the big man's question, he thought furiously. To lie or tell the truth?

A lie would achieve little. He told the truth. "It is wholly fact."

Roland pondered--then, with a suddenness which sent Rick's mind spinning, he asked, "Who are you?"

"I--I don't. . Rick. I'm Rick."

"Rick who?"

Rick caught himself. Roland's sudden question had evoked an instinctive response. He looked at his questioner and again debated with himself as to whether he should falsify or not. It was hard--but he came up with: "I don't know."

"Then do you know where you come from?"

Rick winced at the sudden memory of flaming infinities. Roland didn't fail to catch the wince. .before Rick could reply, he said, "It hurts. It really hurts, doesn't it?"

Rick's eyes were wondering. "How do you know?"

"I know. Come on, friend, where are you from?"

Perplexity swelling through him, Rick shook his head. "I don't know. I honestly don't . . . there was only pain and something . . . something . . . an exploding sun . . ."

"You mean you don't remember?" Roland was surprised at the sudden sympathy in his tones.

"I don't. I - - don't know who I am either." Rick glanced defiantly

at Roland in case the man doubted.

Roland knew truth when he saw it. "I believe you, never fear. Now . . .ah. Drinks. Would you like some?"

Rick saw the palace servant approach. Feeling somewhat more at his ease than he thought he should, he replied, "Very much so. Thanks."

For a while they talked over drinks. Roland made it clear that Rick and Ruthalyn were welcome guests of his, not prisoners. They were free to leave whenever they wished. For certain reasons he was interested in Rick, he explained, and wanted the couple to be with him for several days.

Ruthalyn's gaze sharpened at that. "Do you mean you're responsible for Rick's loss of memory?"

"No, no, Miss Melville. Nothing like that. But - - I think I know why Rick lost his memory."

"Why?"

"I despair of ever adequately explaining my meaning to you, Miss Melville. No offense is intended, but . . ." Roland rubbed his chin slowly, continued: ". . .a concept is involved. It is a vast concept. It involves an infinity of infinite universes co-existing in the same point of space-time - - if you follow me."

Ruthalyn registered negation. "I - - don't." But Rick said of a sudden, "Continuumal theory? Time-tracks created by material processes, following a fifth-dimensional function of Probability and resulting in an infinity of possible variations of one universe - - is that what you mean?"

Incredulity fell across Roland's features. "Wh . . . yes, yes, that's precisely what I mean. Do you remember who had the first glimmering of the concept?"

Rick's face screwed up in thought. "Leibnitz, wasn't it? Metaphysical nonsense over the best of all possible worlds. Monadology and all that."

Roland took a very deep breath "Yes. Correct. Only there never was a Leibnitz on this particular world. His ancestors were slaughtered by mad bands of soldiers under the control of a demon-cult. He was never born. Do you realize what that means, Rick?"

Rick sighed. "I - - think I do. But it hurts."

"Think! After Leibnitz, what? Can you remember up to your own time?"

Rick tried. Sweat cloaked his brow. Pain wrenched his features. "I can't," he said despairingly. "There is only vagueness . . . faces and meaningless names. A tall thin man with a blackish beard and a very wise face, wearing a tophat. Lincoln. . .a strange cloud, round and blazing, supported by a frenzied gaseous column . . . a Moon shuttle . . . "

Rick's face blanched white. "It is flaming. It is coming down out of a night sky and burning like a meteor . . . Oh, Lord, such terrible light and heat. . ." He sat very still, eyes wide. He was clenching his seat cruelly, the sweat dripping off his strong chin. "Lord . . . " he murmured at last. " . . . it was hell."

Ruthalyn regarded him with overwhelming concern. "What, Ricky? What is a Moon shuttle?"

"Don't know. But . . . " He could go no farther. The memory was agony. Ruthalyn realized it as did Roland: "That's enough for now, Rick," Roland said calmly. "Let's concentrate on happier things. For one: I'd like you to be my guests for a week or longer. Is it all right with you?"

Ruthalyn said worriedly, "You'll have to notify Papa . . . Jacob Melville . . . and tell him that Rick and

I are all right. He is probably very worried."

"Of course. It shall be done immediately." Roland rang for a servant, asked Ruthalyn to write a note for Jacob. She finished it by the time the servant arrived; it was taken away immediately.

And Roland looked sidewards at Rick and felt a vague uneasiness steal through him. The man was undeniably from an alternate univêrse. Those chaotic memories screamed the fact. But - - who was he? Was he a Dion Roland from some inconceivable universe twenty years behind his own? The familiarity was so pronounced as to be not a little terrifying. And the woman . . .

She, too, disturbed Roland. It was something about her. She resembled Rick nearly as much as Rick resembled Roland. Like she was his sister; Roland himself the father of the two . . .

Father?

A chill swept through him.

He brushed aside the disquieting thoughts; told Rick and Ruthalyn, "You can leave now if you want; I'd like to be left alone for a while. How would you like to be shown through the palace? I'll summon a servant to act as your guide."

"We'd love it," Ruthalyn said eagerly. "Right, Ricky?"

He smiled wanly. "Right."

"Excellent." Roland rang for a servant; sent him off with Rick and Ruthalyn. It felt a little strange to be alone once again. And Roland thought it odd that he should feel alone - - for basically he was an isolationist. The ties between himself and Rick and Ruthalyn seemed impossibly strong considering the briefness of their acquaintance. Also queer was the ease with which they had gotten along. After the first few seconds of conversation, the natural hostility to "strangers" had vanished on the part of all of them. They had talked like friends ancient.

Roland got to his feet, began pacing. There had to be an explanation for the strange relationship. He rubbed his chin as he trained his excellent mind on the problem. One fact was sure: The man Rick was obviously from another continuum, like himself. Only, Rick had lost most of his memory in the transit.

The woman . . . Roland jerked. What about the woman? The resemblance between her and Rick was very marked. Was she too from another continuum? He made a mental note to inquire into her past. As he was doing so, he heard Valin enter his chambers.

Interest was evident in the small man's pinched yet subtly cruel features. "It is not often you have guests, my Liege. These new ones - - ah, but I suppose you have already noticed their resemblance to you? The girl, particularly - - she could be your daughter."

Roland nodded absently. "And have you looked at the man? If I didn't know better, I could swear he was myself twenty years younger."

"True, my Lord." Valin ran a nervous hand through his long black hair; drew his cloak up around his shoulders. "Have I your permission to discuss certain matters regarding the activities of our opposition?"

"The Underground of the countyfolk? Go ahead, Valin."

Valin helped himself to what was left of the drinks. "To begin with, my Lord, I assume you have read reports on the growth of the movement . . the latest ones."

"I have. Proceed."

"Today, as you know, the Council of Alchemists convened to inspect

the situation. Their decision was practically unanimous - - and that is that the Underground constitutes a definite threat to our organization."

A faint smile quirked Roland's lips. "I could have told you as much three years ago. Longer, even. What of it?"

"They want your opinion of the matter."

"They shall have it. You know me well enough to realize I'm never idle, Valin. These past two years have I been plotting out a course of action which will, I am reasonably confident, shatter our opposition. Conclusively and ultimately."

Over his glass, Valin regarded his master. His beady black eyes sparkled with anticipation. Wiping his lips, he commented, "Excellent, my Lord. You have only my deepest admiration . . . for I know full well your cunning surpasses even mine."

"And you're no miser when it comes to shrewdness," laughed Roland. "Come. I shall give you an outline of what I've worked out - - you present it to the Council and bring me their opinion when they reach it."

"As you say."

"Have a seat then." As Valin took one, Roland did also. Rubbing his chin in thought for a few seconds, Roland at last concentrated on Valin and began:

"You probably know that the Truthseekers, as they call themselves, is an organization roughly fifty years old and that it was originated by rebellious Alchemists." A confirming nod from Valin; Roland continued, "Those early rebels and the ones who later joined them are no fools. They do not plan anything as pointless and destructive as an all-out rebellion; I feel it's almost a sure fact that what they will attempt will be an effort at swinging the greater portion of the population of Satania over to their cause, and use numbers plus the threat of destruction as a club to hold over our heads. They will try to force us to resign."

"That they would do, my Liege," Valin agreed.

Thoughtfully, Roland resumed, "The entire foundation of my plan is based on the almost positive fact that today the Truthseekers are far from ready to show their hand. We must force them, while they are still unprepared, out into the open. I have not proposed this sooner for the good reason that at the time, the underground was still a small thing, widely scattered. A pogrom would merely have taught them a lesson; leaders would surely have escaped to found the Truthseekers anew. But today, they constitute a fairly massive body . . . and if we harass them enough, they will most assuredly launch an attack against us in their desperation. In their unprepared state, the outcome of the attack will, almost undoubtedly, result in their near-total annihilation. Their morale will be smashed beyond repair. The populace will have been impressed with a display of the Alchemic might. There will be no new Underground for at least another half-century."

Valin considered; his feral black eyes suddenly glittered. "All very well, my Liege . . . but surely, even as you have said, the Truthseekers are far from stupid. They must realize the same thing."

"Of course they do. But you must remember that their position is not a flexible one They cannot do much should we start making trouble for them - - and to make trouble is exactly what I propose. Many Imperial spies, you well know, are 'in'

the Underground. They are due to report to me soon, and they will give me the locations and dates of future Underground meetings in various portions of Satania. Empire troops will launch raids on all these meetings. Truthseekers will be captured. Information will be gained from them . . information which, I feel confident, will drive the Underground to an act of desperation, which is precisely what we want."

Valin studied the floor with slitted eyes. "Forgive me for so saying, my Lord, but this sounds a little too simple. I should imagine that the Truthseekers have by now drawn the same conclusions and are taking defensive steps this very moment."

"Undoubtedly," Roland patiently agreed. "They probably have spies in this very Palace. They are assuredly planning like mad to prevent me from doing what I just outlined. But theirs is the disadvantage. Because of its very nature, their organization cannot be as strong as ours. They know not which of their members are our agents and which are not. Ovarron favors us, and tells us to strike soon while the situation is yet ripe for us."

Valin shrugged. "I am not one to dispute your word, my Lord Yet . . . well, I suppose you know of what you speak."

"Very well. You may tell the Council now of my plan."

Valin got to his feet, looked down at his master. "One other thing, my Liege."

"Yes?"

"When is this action to take place?"

Roland smiled lazily. "I'm not saying. I suspect the Truthseekers have men even in the Council. It will not harm to let them know what I plan, because I intend to strike before they can form any effective countermove. But it would harm to let them know when my plan goes into effect."

"It is logical. Ovarron be with you, my Lord."

"And with you. You may leave."

Roland sighed as he watched Valin go. A question had been mulled over. Action had been taken against a threat to Empire. Empire, the pinnacle of Power.

Power.

A vice. A habit. An insane vehicle for wreaking a nonexistent revenge on unjust fates. Roland admitted it to himself vehemently. Why had he become the Sorcerer Supreme of Satania? A short derisive laugh forced itself from his throat. Always would he tell himself he did it because he wanted to assist a primitive peoples along the path to civilization. Always would the acidic knowledge that he was deceiving himself burn in his chest.

He had not gained power for any altruistic purposes.

He had gained power for revenge.

And that upon which he wanted to wreak revenge sneered at him with a face as huge as Infinity.

Roland thrust himself angrily to his feet and started pacing. He inwardly knew he was going to have to have things out with himself He cursed the turmoil within. Even more fiercely he cursed that unknown agency which had long ago stolen him from Doris.

It had warped him all right. Bitter but undefeated, he had fought. For power. He had attained it... for what?

To taunt invisible fates. To show them he had no more need for Doris.

They laughed at him. And he knew it.

Furiously he strode over to the balcony. At times the tumult in-

side grew unbearable. Consolation was what he needed - - but where was consolation? Doris, Doris, ah, Doris, if only I could pour myself out to you once again; to drown my agony in your magnificent breast...

He looked down at his hands and saw that they were trembling With a snarl, he calmed them. An isolationist, he was. An isolationist for twenty years. Solitary. Fuming. A cesspool of repressed madness. It could not go on much longer. Doris no longer mattered; she was an infinity away...a million infinities...

Yet he clung by her. **Link of sanity, my Doris. My last chain to the world I knew. Why? Why? Why cannot I forgot...?**

Was it revulsion? Resentment? Defiance of the Infinite?

It was all, and it was driving him to insanity.

He growled as he knew what he needed. A woman; sympathy and perfume, softness and love. Sparkling eyes shedding tears for him; arms creamy and welcoming ready to drain his inner horrors with strokes of passion, fire-flaring He'd have to forget Doris; relinquish his last connection with a forever vanished universe. He was no god. He was a man. He would have to stop playing the part of Omnipotence.

He stood on the balcony for a long time, clenching the railing so tight his hands whitened. And with an expressionless unseeing face he stared as the sun set; died; and the night flowed across the world. At last, with hung head, he entered his chambers.

V

The Patio was broad and open. It faced the west; plain was the ocean in the distance because it was framed by a horizon-mantling afterglow. The evening winds rushed in from the sea, heavy with salt-tang and spray-mist. Rick looked at Ruthalyn, who was standing by the railing, silhouetted against the pale greenish gold of the dying sunset. He saw that she was all the more beautiful

"Happy?" he asked.

"Only because I'm with you, Ricky."

They had had a fairly interesting afternoon inspecting the great palace which was situated roughly near the center of the tip of a fairly broad and long peninsula. One side of the peninsula faced the restless sea; the other was caressed by the gentle waters of a gigantic landlocked bay. Two mountain-massive peninsular arms surrounded the bay in a solid hug, leaving but a single gap, one mile wide, for the ocean to enter. It was a perfect harbor, defended from the wildest of seas by its cradle of mountains.

The palace squatted tremendous on the highest peak of the southern peninsula-arm. Full five hundred feet high into the sky its cube-like bulk reared; its upper levels were dotted with balconies numberless. Solid black granite was that fortress-like edifice; and as it glinted in the dying light, Rick felt admiration for the men who had made it. The granite had been transported from a vast range of mountains two hundred miles to the east, across a long grassy plain . . .

Rick poured a glass of amber wine at a nearby table; joined Ruthalyn. Together they sipped the wine. They were discovering the delight of silent love. It was an understanding for one another; a feeling for which no word ever existed. To be together was enough. It was ecstacy.

It was irresistible.

Rick gathered Ruthalyn into his arms; kissed her with tender vehe-

mence. He forgot about the wine he held; he forgot about everything. The glass slipped from his fingers to plunge five hundred feet to its annihilation.

"Oh, Ricky, Ricky beloved. I'm -- I'm **happy**. You know what I mean?"

"Wholly so, dearest."

"And?"

"I want you to be my wife, darling."

"Then—?"

"We'll live near Jacob. I can help him with the inn. We'll have children strong . . ."

"And we'll have each other."

"Always."

But then a faintly troubled look crossed Ruthalyn's features. "One - - thing - - bothers me, Ricky."

"What?" he asked, releasing her.

"It's about you . . . suppose you get your memory back . . . oh, Ricky, you might **forget** me."

"I couldn't . . ."

"How do you **know**?"

"I don't," he reluctantly admitted, "But . . ."

"Kiss me, beloved," she said urgently. He did so. He didn't like to think about what might happen should he get his memory back, and neither did she. But he could tell she was worried.

After a very long time, when even the afterglow had wholly faded from the horizon, she whispered in his ear, "Be careful over here, my Ricky. Keep your eyes open. Remember that our first loyalty is with the Truthseekers."

"I'll be careful. I promise, darling."

"I . . . **oh!**"

A figure, small and thin, was approaching them, his long cloak billowing in the night wind. It was Valin. He bowed, said, "I was looking for you, good people. Excuse me if I have intruded . . . but I should like to announce that dinner will soon be ready. If you please, I shall guide you to your chambers, where you will find baths and a complete change of outfits waiting you. His Magical Majesty will be expecting you at the dinner table."

"Thanks, good fellow. Please do take us."

"As you will."

The dinner was held in Roland's simple chambers Dion Roland himself stood up to greet his guests; something he rarely did. "I am greatly pleased that you came, my friends. Here, take your seats." They did, Rick at his left and Ruthalyn at his right.

The Sorcerer Supreme smiled at the two as dinner was placed before them. "Tonight," he said, "A show will be put on for your entertainment."

"Really," Ruthalyn began, "we don't deserve . . ."

"Ah, my dear, but you **do** deserve it. It is the least I can do to apologize for the treatment you were given; this show is by way of apology. It will be put on by mighty Ovarron himself."

Ruthalyn's lips formed a soundless **oh**; Roland saw it and smiled. "Do not be afraid, my dear. Ovarron is your servant and your protector; he is the friend of all Satania. In his power is he benevolent."

She nodded weakly; contemplated with awe the electric lights overhead. Rick paid no heed although he couldn't have said why. Instead, he concentrated on Roland and asked, "How do you mean when you say Ovarron will stage this show?"

Roland politely shrugged. "As in a play involving the supernatural, so is this show. It will, I hope, give you some pleasurable shudders . . .

and while you are viewing it, keep in mind the fact that absolutely no harm will befall you. Ovarron, praised be Him, will see to that."

So they set about finishing supper, and inwardly, Roland was anticipating the soon to come show. It was a thing based on certain principles. And it was very awe-inspiring. He could hardly wait to see his guests' reaction to it.

When dinner was over, they were led out of the palace by Roland, Valin staying behind. They went out into the courtyard and were instantly met by a whipping wind. They followed a dimly-lit trail into a scraggly wood, and the wind soughed eerily through the gnarled trees. A sickly infant moon was rearing its horns above the eastern horizon . . .

Roland explained to his friends, "Much of my Palace grounds constitute a game preserve. Often are the times I go hunting in these woods for my relaxation. There are some very fine imported deer here."

His guests nodded; and they came out into a very large clearing. Overhead the stars blazed and the moon silvered the dry rustling grass of the small meadow. It waved with the sighing wind, and Roland raised his hands. "This, friends, is the stage for the show. Consider yourselves very privileged to witness such as this - - Ovarron honors only those who deserve"

They nodded; awe was now undeniably with them. Roland grinned and made motions in the air. He himself knew perfectly well what would soon happen, and why . but the sheer weirdness of it never failed to delight him.

And that night was no exception.

For a while there was only stillness . . . then the wind picked up again and moaned through the dark twisted wood. Imperceptibly the horned moon climbed in the sky, flinging wan silver across the nighted meadow . . .

In the sky, among the stars - - with distance tiny, a glimmer of blue. Expanding; nebulous, stirring with some invisible currents of Something.

Met their ears a high piping. Through the grass it slithered, like a thing alive; wailing through the dark treetops . . . shrill of pitch and rising, crescendoing . . .

Like a wave across the heavens stretching came the blueness. Ghastly and ghostly blue was it; putrid with light-decay, rotten as if dredged from some nether Hades . . . then it resolved; showed its nature; nature of horror.

Demons all, wrenching and writhing and howling. Riding nags of Hades across the meadow . . . in profusion unimaginable, sweeping and towering and overwhelming. Came the ghostly thunder of a billion blue hooves, mounting up into a howling sky. Past the three awe-struck humans hurtled the hell-nags and their demon riders, riding the winds of Eternity, shimmering rotten blue and glaring with eyes of red horror.

Pipings, terror-shrill, screaming to a fantastic crescendo . . . then a long low dimuendo groaning away into the skies, followed by the stampeding numberless hordes of Things, fading, fading, leaving only a profound stillness . . .

Which was shattered by a welling roar. Followed a cataclysmic tearing and snapping, out of the ground erupted a Form; blackness more profound than Stygia; twitterings and cooings and roarings . . . all combining, condensing . . . swelling, exploding, blotting out the stars.

A grumbling as of a billion thun-

ders - - then flecks of light which emitted a horrible shrilling, spinning with flares of polychromic confusion up into that vast primal blackness; then concussions of light and an **OOOOOO** which wailed with some fearsome despair up into the incarnation of all the Black Gods . . .

A thunderclap of light and sound! An avalanche of twitterings, blending into scattered dissolution.

Then, nothing. Only the sad wind in the trees.

Eruption of chaos, grinding as of two galactic millstones . . . and Ovarron stood in the clearing, three thousand feet tall, body of molten gold flaming with the light of a young sun and cast from a mold of indescribable perfection . . .

That supreme Face smiled; nodded at the paralyzed humans. For only a few more seconds He remained, letting them bask in His glory. Then was He hurtling up to the myriad suns, His body dwindling into the night skies.

The silence which He left in His wake was awesome.

"It is over," said Roland in a small voice after a very long time had passed.

They walked back to the palace, and they were all speechless. But once they had passed beneath the sheltering entrance, Ruthalyn asked in low tones, "What did we see?"

"The Legions of Ovarron," Roland answered genially. "No god is without his following; we saw mighty Ovarron's folk."

She said no more - - but both Rick and Roland saw that her slim richly-gowned form was trembling. And Roland found himself, surprisingly, beginning to like her.

Much later that night, Dion Roland lay awake in bed. His two guests had had no more questions.. what they'd seen had shaken them to their roots. Roland grinned at that. He could hardly blame them. What they'd seen could frighten its creators, despite the fact that they knew perfectly well what it was. And he himself, who had spent twelve painful years making the necessary equipment, always was startled It was merely a crude adaptation of the most successful means of entertainment in his own continuum. What had been seen were projections . . . illusions created by a somewhat complex projection device utilizing electromagnetically controlled polarized particles within counter-balancing magnetic fields plus synchronized patterns of light . . .

Yet they were so terribly real.

He remembered how startled the woman, Ruthalyn, had been. Those azure eyes of hers had opened surprisingly. Her entire lovely form had been a symphony of feline tension and grace.

It came to him then that he wanted her. He could not precisely say why - - but it seemed to him that she was capable of - - **helping** - - him. He tried to analyze his feelings. He failed. All he knew was that somehow he wanted her. She was all beauty.

And tender . . .

Compassionate, surely . . .

Ah, Doris, thee I forget . . .

Tomorrow to see Ruthalyn . . and he was falling into an untroubled soothing blackness of slumber.

In the first pink-grey shimmerings of dawn, a figure entered the guest room given to Rick. It knelt beside the sleeping man's form and shook him gently. He writhed; came awake with a start. "Wh . . . "

"It's just me, Ricky."

"Oh . . . what is it, Ruthalyn?" He sat up and rubbed sleep from his eyes.

"About last night, Rick . . . I'm worried."

Memory came to Rick of those fearsome Shapes; lurid blue demons on equally horrible hell-nags; of the huge Dark Thing which had sprung from the earth; of Ovarron the mighty. And he knew why Ruthalyn was worried even before she told him. The Truthseekers. If such Things could be conjured from whatever nether dimensions they haunted . . .

He shuddered.

"You know what I mean, Ricky? The Truthseekers . . . "

He nodded. "But what can I do?"

"I . . . don't know. But we must tell Papa Jacob."

"We must," he agreed.

She kissed him. "Let's get ready for breakfast. I'll meet you at the table. Okay?"

"Of course."

Dion Roland had them up to his chambers; greeted them genially. "I trust you had a pleasant night's sleep?"

So the conversation went, revolving around inconsequential things. Breakfast was served and consumed. Then Roland turned the conversation into a more serious channel. "I have been thinking much over you, Rick. Your knowledge of alternate continuums and several other things bear strong implications. If you do not mind, I would like to have you take a test."

Interested, Rick asked, "What kind of a test?"

"A word-definition test. I prepared a long list of words for you; I'd like it if you went through them and put down their meanings. It will tell me much."

Rick shrugged. "I'd be glad to if you want it."

"Excellent. You and Ruthalyn meet me here in an hour. Okay?"

It was agreed to. They left shortly after, and Roland tipped back in his chair. The word-definition test was composed entirely of terms which no inhabitant of Satania or some similar continuum could know. Words like Moon-shuttle, the Lockheed drive, aerocab, and certain common equations such as $E=mc^2$. It should keep the man Rick occupied . . . and it should provide Roland with an hour or so to be alone with Ruthalyn.

The more Roland thought of Ruthalyn, the more he felt attracted to her. She was very young, yes; very young in comparison with Roland's forty-two years . . . but she was desirable. And it was high time for him to discard his lunatic loyalty to Doris. It was little more than a perverse obsession, he fully realized, and was doing more damage than good. And Doris was very probably dead . . . yet he winced as he couldn't quite admit it.

But to return to Ruthalyn - - it was quite evident that she loved the man Rick. And it then dawned on Roland he wanted her badly enough to take her from Rick. He tried unsuccessfully to suppress his feelings by explaining them off as his first spasm of freedom. Had he not cast off the fetters of Doris? Was not a concubine just as good . . . And he grunted as he realized he was lying to himself. He knew what he wanted. Ruthalyn. Yet he couldn't understand why.

No matter. Who wouldn't like her? Beautiful, intelligent, forceful character . . . yet she loved the man Rick. What to do about it . . . ?

A concept! Incredible, impossible concept . . . Roland was suddenly on his feet and pacing nervously. Rick and Ruthalyn - - they looked so very much alike. More alike than brother and sister . and the man

Rick came from another continuum.

Could it be?

Could Rick be Ruthalyn? One and the same?

The alternate universes are incomprehensible. Assumption: In one continuum, there is a man and a woman. They mate. The mother conceives a daughter. Call them Man^{x} and Woman^{x} and Female Child^{x}. In another continuum we have a man who is the same as Man^{x}. He mates with a woman who is the same as Woman^{x}. She conceives a child . . . but the child bears one difference from Female Child^{x}. The child is born a male. Ergo: Female Child^{x} of Continuum A is one and the same person as Male Child of Continuum B. A closer relationship than brother-sister.

The more Roland thought over it, the more possible it seemed. It would explain fully the amazing resemblance between Rick and Ruthalyn . . .

Then his carefully built up theory crumbled to that mental dust upon which nearly all theories eventually shatter. Rick quite undeniably came from a continuum which had seen Leibnitz, Lincoln, the hydrogen bomb, and Moon-shuttles. Such a continuum was so far removed from Satania that the chances were infinity to one against Rick's parents being the same as Ruthalyn's. It was just an odd coincidence, their resemblance . . .

Yet still, the idea was good. Incest is an almost universally revolting concept as far as humans are concerned. And if he could convince first Ruthalyn then Rick that they were one and the same person . .

She would be his.

A noise behind him announced Rick and Ruthalyn's return. It did not take him long to set up the test; he told Rick, "There are three hundred words here. Take your time about putting down definitions. Don't try to think meanings out . . . don't think at all. Just let definitions 'come naturally'. If you can't place a word, let it go."

"I'll try."

"Fine. I'll take Ruthalyn up to the roof patio so you can be alone while you work on it. You can find us there when you finish."

So Roland escorted Ruthalyn up to the patio while Rick set to work. Once there, he had some drinks prepared, and invited Ruthalyn to a seat. For a while he merely gazed at her, sipping his cocktail. He at last said, "You're in love with Rick, aren't you?"

She shot him a quizzical glance. "You might say I am."

"In more ways than one you are. And I am very sad."

"How do you mean?"

"I could tell you, but I fear you might not understand. It is something very unpleasant."

Her features grew worried. "Why, my Lord?"

"It is a possible - - in fact it is - - a threat to your happiness with Rick. And I do not like to talk about it."

Concern filled her eyes. "You must tell me, my Liege."

He sighed. "Please, my dear, do not foist such an unpleasant task on me. I couldn't bear to see you in tears . . "

She grasped his hand. "Please."

He shook his head. "It goes against my better instincts . . . but you must know of it so you can decide. And basically I am a frank person. Promise me one thing, my dear?"

"I will."

"Please do not blame me for what I will say next."

"I promise, my Lord."

"You realize that I know many

things, Ruthalyn? Do you realize that I understand matters of which you have never thought?"

She nodded.

Slowly he said, "The parents which gave birth to you also gave birth to Rick. You are more closely related to him than if you and he were identical twins."

She gasped; her face blanched white. "Wh . . . my Lord, how is this . . . oh, my Lord, I know not who my own parents were. I was a waif found in the streets of Medea. How then can you say this?"

His eyes were very solemn when he said, "I can say it because of several factors. The first of these is the very, very pronounced resemblance between you and Rick . . . down to eyes the same shade of blue. The second factor is somewhat more complex, but I will do my best to make you understand. . ."

After about half an hour, Ruthalyn nodded wearily. "Enough, my Lord. I grasp your meaning when you speak of alternate universes which co-exist. And I am afraid to ask you how this connects Rick and me."

"Why are you afraid?"

"Because I think I know what you will say. His parents . . . "

"Yes, my dear, they were yours. Identical. Rick is merely Ruthalyn Melville born a male. You have fallen in love with yourself."

Anguish screamed from every line in her body. Dully she got to her feet and walked over to the railing. She stood there a very long while, and Roland knew that tears were in her eyes. Soundless little tears welling out to spill down her cheeks. Beneath her azure-crimson silken gown, he could see her shoulders jerk in a spasm of sobbing.

After a while, he went over to her. Supremely gentle, he gripped her shoulders. "Don't cry so, Ruthalyn. Your anguish is also mine."

"I . . . I . . . "

"It has been a terrible shock. You must get over it."

"I . . . oh, my Lord, **how?**"

"Let me help." He drew her to himself, and kissed away her tears. She sobbed a little and held him tight. Her happy dreams had been so hideously shattered that she needed a buffer . . . and Dion Roland was so strong yet tender and understanding . . .

And that was the scene Rick burst in upon. His instincts didn't give him a chance to think. **"You bastard!"** he roared, and charged.

Lips bleeding, he picked himself off the granite floor. Dion Roland stood over him, regretfully rubbing his bloodied knuckles. "I'm sorry I had to do that, lad. I didn't like it, believe me. You don't understand."

"As if I were an idiot . . . " began Rick hotly.

"Listen!" Roland's tones were firm. They grew firmer as he explained the situation to Rick. " . . . so, you see, you are in love with yourself. It is a horrible thing - - but you must be thankful that I pieced the facts together in time. Incest is an ugly matter. It would have been infinitely worse had you learned of it a year or so in the future."

Numbly Rick staggered to his feet. Something had died in him. A great faith had been lost. A supreme glory had been stolen. He felt strangely empty.

Roland helped him over to a seat. "I'm sorry, lad, believe me. I wish I could have broken it to you easier, but you gave me no chance. Go to your room for the time being and sleep. It will help lessen the shock. Here, have a drink first." He poured a glass of wine and summoned a ser-

vant.

Rick downed the wine; stared stupidly off at nothing. Unprotestingly he let the servant help him to his feet. Roland looked sadly after him; turned to a sobbing Ruthalyn. "Now, now, dear," he soothed. "You need rest too." He kissed her; she buried her face in his great chest.

Strange emotions rose in Roland. Triumph and a slight compassion for Rick. It had been a cruel deception . . . but, well, Ruthalyn was worth so much more.

Roland stroked Ruthalyn's hair. She was now his

She was, he saw, still crying. He caught her chin and tilted her face to his. "Please don't let it crush you so, my dear. What hurts you pains me a thousandfold more."

She was superbly alluring, her azure eyes sharp even behind tear-mist. "My little Panther-eyes," he soothed.

"Panther . . . ?" she asked weakly.

"A creature of the jungle. A cat big and black and very powerful. And very beautiful."

A wan smile graced her lips. "Th - - thank you, my Lord. Please, may I be excused now? It has been so trying."

"Of course, Panther-eyes," he comforted. Before she left he kissed her with a firm calm passion.

Twenty minutes later, Roland was soundlessly swearing in amazement. In his hands he held the word-association test he'd given Rick. It told so terribly much. It proved conclusively that Rick was indeed from an alternate universe, and not only that, it showed that Rick came from a parallel continuum very similar to Roland's own - - if, indeed, it wasn't the same.

Rick had effortlessly explained such concepts as "Triplanetary Federation," "Lunapolis," "College of Syrtis Major," "Moon-shuttle," and some of the slang age . . . "Vacuum-brains," "To Mars and Bim-Bam," "A true-green Venusoaf" . . .

And Roland also realized Rick's potential value. If he could win Rick into his confidence, slowly draw out Rick's memory if possible, he might gain much. Especially if Rick had been a scientist.

Roland contentedly leaned back in his chair. Power. Rick was a potential boost for the power he already held. A vice, a habit . . . the hell with it. He liked it. He wanted it. He would get it.

And use it.

For what?

Mentally he roared at the futility of it all then tore his despairing thoughts into new channels. He thought of Ruthalyn. Woman through and through. Open, soft, vivacious. A well in which to drown his anxieties; a well in which to drown Doris' lingering memory.

Ruthalyn . . .

Ah, dearest, but you shall be my queen!

Mental agony was Rick's bedcompanion.

He lay awake in his room. He felt very lost, very frightened and alone. Turmoil seethed across his mind. Coherence was what he yearned for- -but it would not come. Disjointed words and disjointed phrases. Kaleidoscopic pictures; flares of color, explosions of remembered sensation; shifting, merging, seething . . .

Spinning. Soaring. Exploding.

This is as it shall be. I am I. Turbid turbulence mine . . . Ruthalyn.

Incarnation of what? Femininity, eternity, M . . .

Word-horror, concept of horror . . .

My . . .

Lord, why is this being done . . .

Myse . . .

Why cannot I admit it? Lord; for thou art I, or is it she . . . ?

For she is me; she is myself. Myself.

Mother . . .

Disgust and pain. Rick tore the covers from his bed and sprang to his feet. He calmed his shaking form. Ruthalyn - - a sibling. A sibling in which he saw himself. Narcissistic tendencies; what was he? An idiot, vain and self-adoring? Why pursue an abortive love? Why fall into the blissful abyss of self-worship with her?

Crystallization of decision. Resolution. Resignation. Vast cold black wave, surging and swamping and engulfing. He bit his lip as he built up Ruthalyn's image. Snarling he ripped it into tiny wailing shreds which fluttered away on the winds of his mind. Dependence was forsaken. Independence was gained. The ties of emotion were rejected.

The effort left him weak. The rejection of his sole pattern for the future left only bleakness. It had to be replaced. How where when?

The Truthseekers.

Of them he was still a member. With them still lay his loyalties. To reject or not to reject?

Jacob had been very kind...

Not to reject. It was a goal. A future. A plan for his destiny. After all, what was Ruthalyn? Just a woman. There were a billion women. A billion women who were not **himself.** She had merely been a hook upon which to hang his bewildered emotions. A hook all the more enticing because she was really himself in female disguise.

It occurred to him that he might have questioned Dion Roland's word. No matter. Decision had been reached; besides, Roland had seemed sincere. If anyone, he was the one who should know what he was talking about. So things were settled. Nothing remained but to get back to Jacob.

VI

The two men sat across from one another. That there was a tension between them was subtly evident. It hung like a static charge in the air and served only to increase their uneasiness. For a long time had they sat thus, saying nothing, staring at each other.

Dion Roland at last hunched his great shoulders and relaxed. "Well, Rick, may I have the privilege of assuming that you are wondering why I sent for you?"

Rick shrugged. "Of course."

Sighing, Roland said, "You seem rather sullen, Rick. Is it because of what happened yesterday?"

"What else could it be?"

"I concede to that. I sympathize with you. But as I have said before, you should be somewhat thankful that the fact was discovered in time. Suppose you had married Ruthalyn? Believe me, the consequences could easily have been unimaginable. It would have been worse than father marrying daughter."

Rick's smile was wry-bitter. "I suppose so. No matter. I have dismissed the situation wholly."

"That is very good; it shows that your will is strong. Rick - - if you wanted to, you could go far here in Satania."

Rick rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "How do you mean?"

From a table beside him, Roland took a sheet of paper. "Recognize this?"

"The test I took yesterday. What of it?"

"This proves conclusively that you came from another continuum - - a continuum at least as advanced

as my own - - indeed, if not my own. It means that your potential knowledge is great when compared with the people of this continuum -- even the Alchemists. And I am reasonably certain you already know something if not all about the organization of Satania. Your potential knowledge can be used to assure you a position of power."

"Why this interest in my welfare?" asked Rick bluntly.

"I should imagine it would be obvious. I feel a kinship with you because you went through the same kind of experience I did twenty years ago . . . "

"**You** did!" exclaimed Rick. "Yes . . . it must be so. I had been wondering how you knew so much. But," his eyes narrowed, ". . how do you know **you** aren't the counterpart of Ruthalyn Melville?"

"Stop clutching at straws, Rick. I'm old enough to be her father . . . "

"I'll be damned!" Rick breathed slowly. "You **could** be her father. How do you know you aren't?"

Roland didn't like it. Slightly angry, he countered with, "You're getting absurd, Rick."

"Perhaps," Rick sighed. "Forgive me. I was clutching at straws, like you say. But - - did you really come from another continuum?"

"I cannot say. Man cannot be sure of anything. But at least, it is the only thing I can figure. I can remember a happy life in an advanced civilization which disappeared one night when all the skies blazed open. I found myself in Satania with the knowledge of that other continuum. I applied it and became the Sorcerer Supreme "

"You retained your memory?"

"I did. And one thing, Rick - - I have placed you in my confidence Please do not tell others what I have told you. They are not ready for it."

"All right," Rick promised, "I shall be silent. But to get back to the subject - - what do you want from me?"

"Nothing. All I wish is to help you get back your memory."

The idea held no small appeal for Rick, now that Ruthalyn was definitely out of the picture. "Do you think you can?"

"I have no idea," Roland said truthfully. "But with your co-operation, I can try."

"What should I do then?"

"Just stay at the Palace a few more days. We'll try to work things out."

After five minutes of silence, Rick said, "All right."

"Shake over it, man?"

Rick looked into Roland's eyes for long seconds. Wordlessly he shook. Roland smiled appreciatively after his receding back. Rick was playing himself right into his hands. Power. . .

Things were going beautifully.

Time passed. One day; two; three . . .they blended into a week. And Dion Roland worked hard to gain Rick's confidence- -a little too hard. He had underestimated Rick and overdone his act. So Rick saw quite clearly that Roland wanted something from him. And upon seeing that, Rick wanted to find out just what it was that Roland was after. So he played along. . .

Until the day when Roland, in his self-confidence, felt he could trust Rick enough to discuss his plans against the Truthseekers. For two hours he had expounded the virtues of himself as Sorcerer Supreme of Satania; his far-flung plans for righting the warped setup of Empire; how the Truthseekers, although their motives were as al-

truistic as his own, would disrupt the better path to the future.

Rick had not been deceived for a second. He had come to know Roland quite well--to the extent of seeing slightly into the man's inner self. And there he saw the frustrated turmoil which was Roland the Man. So he patiently sat through Roland's explanations of how the Truthseekers came into being and how his plans came to bear on them.

And Rick's loyalties still lay with the Truthseekers.

Escape was imperative.

So as not to arouse any shade of suspicion in Roland, Rick waited for two days after hearing Roland explain his plans before he approached the Sorcerer Supreme and said, "Dion...I feel somewhat cooped up here. All right if I take out a horse and relax for a week or so?"

Being so sure of himself that he never thought of inquiring deeper into Rick's motives, Roland said of course; even gave Rick a pouch of gold currency used in Satania and saw him off. "A deserved vacation, my friend," he said warmly. "Enjoy yourself to the fullest."

So Rick spurred his steed into the morning sun, heading for approximately the area where he knew Medea to be. Jacob was going to be very much gladdened and very much saddened...

And there remained the mystery of the blue legions of Ovarron.

Dion Roland himself had not been idle for the past week. Ruthalyn had been struck much harder than Rick by the "revelation," and her shock left her malleable to Roland's desires. With words and gestures gentle, he drew out her feelings, reformed them, turned her attention to him. Imperceptibly but insistently she found herself liking him. He was very kind, very gentle, not at all what she'd expected.

One evening they were on the balcony leading from Ruthalyn's bedchambers, watching the dying sun drench all the western heavens with livid crimson. Roland surveyed Ruthalyn; the sullen beauty of the flaming skies made her all the more beautiful. Sunset-fire caught in her hair; shimmered in swirling halos; outlined in soft crimson the smoothness of her cheeks, the beauty of her lips, the moistness of her eyes.

He caught her shoulders softly. "My darling," he whispered. "You are very lovely. My beloved Panther-eyes...may I ask you a question which means much?"

"Of course, Dion."

"Be mine, my beloved. Be my princess, my queen, my pride and my glory."

Her eyes were luminous with the burning clouds. "Dion...I..." The luminosity overflowed, became tears huge and crystal-clear. "Oh, Dion, I feel so confused. I don't know what to say..."

"There's no hurry, my dear Panther-eyes," he murmured. "Take your time."

She trembled against him. There was pain in her. Pain and a void. The void had to be filled. Balm had to be spread across the pain. Psychic balm.

"Oh, Dion, Dion, I can hardly trust myself. It--it--Rick--"

"The remembrance hurts you, little Panther-eyes Leave it alone. Let forgetfulness waft you from agony."

"Dion..."

His arms were gentle yet oh so powerful as they went around her. She responded, and it was natural, and the sunset became some rose-golden haze extending for infinities and eternities. And Dion Ro-

land wondered why that young lithe form should be so hauntingly, wrenchingly familiar...

Then between them an unspoken question flashed. And from her an unvoiced answer welled.

I am yours, my Dion.

She was indeed his. And he was helplessly hers. Her body beneath her gowns was fluid-solid; lithe and liquid and burning...

He could not stop himself. The spell that clutched Ruthalyn clutched him also. He lifted her and bore her into the bedroom beyond. Softly yet with lips which were flame, she murmured against his cheek, "Dion ...my Dion..."

The last glorious ramparts of sunset shone through the open balcony doors; streamed from the dying afterglow as if from some huge volcano erupting a symphony of passion. Ruthalyn stood before Dion as semidusk surged in noiseless tides around the room, and her eyes were embers azure and appealingly beautiful. Hands swam and fluttered; wraiths graceful in the gathering darkness...and a rustle sibilant announced falling gowns; sliding down her waist, her thighs, her legs, crumpling lifeless on the floor to reveal Her...

Impressions, wheeling and confused and delightful. Hair of purest gold swirling and flying; Goddess-lips loosing forth laughter and love and something else. And the oceans of night quietly flowed into the room; nestling in corners; spreading, swelling...

Candles and orange light dancing; flickering splendor playing with the walls tapestried. Drinks and clinking glasses and a music which made love to the soul...

And more drinks; bottles pouring amber and crimson, vermilion and charteuse; fostering mists which curled around, over and through like Ambrosia gaseous; warming each limb, each thought, each fleeting sensation...

Outside the stars exulted in splendor...but the galaxies in Ruthalyn's eyes were beyond compare. She was poured across the bed, an illusion all passion and yearning. The candlelight was a molten glory across her perfect form; her breathing was heavy, expectant. Her breasts rose and fell with an explosion of inner tension...

Arms of golden alabaster lifted; waved; columns of grace and femininity; the portals to a well which would drown all fear and uneasiness and frustration. Perspiration beading his massive unclothed chest, Roland looked down at her. Muscles giant and strong quivered...

Eyes of a panther; body of softness and power...lithe, rippling, the tension of emotion a wild song... Ruthalyn, Ruthalyn, I know not what you have done to me, why I let you do this to me...but you shall be mine, darling, you are mine and my love deluges you as yours deluges me...

Somehow she was in his arms, and Sensation was God...for she was a tempest, a tornado; reddened with the fire and passion of a million Vesuviuses. He buried his face in the hollow of her breasts; let her flaming hands bear away his despair...

So like Doris was she; so like Sylvia of Medea...Sylvia who had given him her body and her passion...

Sylvia...

The shape of those breasts firm and warm; the shape of the waist smooth and trembling...the face of Ruthalyn framed by a golden nebula of hair...so like Sylvia, even the eyes breathless blue...

The eyes...

The breasts, body, eyes...

Her hand, caressing and silken, brushing back his tousled troubled locks. Her hand, with a mark of beauty; a mole crescent-cute...

That mole!

"Sylvia!" he screamed, and tore himself from Ruthalyn. Then was the hall careening past him as detached powerful legs insanely bore him down a flight of stairs; into a Wall looming and immobile; pain and chaos and a great rebounding, hurling him down the remaining flight; blurred impressions of halls of granite sliding and ebon chill... he was on his feet again, roaring, plunging toward his own chambers, leaving behind a cry shrill with terror which quivered forever in the air:

Dion! Di...on!

Not a cloud was in the sky. A serene half moon soaked silver across the world and the stares of the many suns were chill. Chiller, even, than the invisible gale which howled through the pine forest; moaned across the snow plains cloaking the mountainsides; lashed in frenzy at Rick as he galloped on through the night and the forest.

His horse was laboring magnificently, great hot breath whipped away in little clouds by the gale. The whole day had it tirelessly galloped across a broad warm plain All evening had it forged into the foothills of a tremendous mountain range...and now, with the coming of night, it had reached wintry altitudes of gales and bitter snow. And Medea lay yet another twenty miles away if the crude directions peasants had offered were accurate.

The primitive horse road wove on through the forest, and the moon sifted through the tall pines to speckle with ghostly luminescence the blanket of snow which lay across everything. The wind moaned though the trees and drove its fangs of cold cruelly through Rick's clothing. He realized he would have to stop soon. Both he and his steed would freeze before they reached Medea.

Afar a solitary wolf sent its despairing cry into the skies. The gale tore it to shreds. Onwards jogged the horse, crunching through the snow, weakening fast...

The forest floor dipped with the shoulder of a mountain...the pines fell away, revealing a small narrow valley nestling at the foot of the great mountain-shoulder. In the distance peaks reared into the sky; Monoliths black wreathed with some ghost-nimbus gossamer which was the light of the adolescent moon on vast snowfields. Way down in the semiblack of the valley, a tiny colony of lights gregariously cowered. A small mountain village.

Thankful for finding a place to spend the night, Rick guided his steed toward that light-sprinkling. And the gale howled its frustration.

He found an inn; made arrangements for a room for the night and a stable for his horse. Women accosted him. Wearied from his two-hundred-mile journey, he refused them. He went straight to bed...

And was vaguely angry because he could not sleep.

The gale shook the crude wooden walls of his room The coarse linen of his bed was scratchy. But it was not that which disturbed him. It was something else. Something in himself.

He was reluctant about drawing it out. But he did finally, and it was what he expected it to be. It was a chaos of thoughts over Ruthalyn. He could not drive her from his mind. After all, he had honestly

loved her...

Her face stared down at him from the night-hidden ceiling. Serene, beautiful, distant. He squirmed as he felt his heart go out to her. He could not believe that she was himself. It was of a sudden far beyond his capabilities to admit that he could not have her.

Yet he knew he had to admit the fact. He cursed his traitorous feelings as he tried to drive away her image. Had he not already rejected her??? He looked into himself and saw that he had not.

Ruthalyn. Ruthalyn = Rick. Rick = Ruthalyn. Ruthalyn sprang from the loins of Man^x and Woman^x of Dimension A. Rick sprang from the loins of Man^x and Woman^x of Dimension B. Man^x and Woman^x. Mother. Father. Parents of mine of Ruthalyn...

She is me and I am she. I, Female. She, Male. I am in love with myself. Lord, Lord, cannot you spare me this torture...

Hell! With a supreme effort he shattered the train of thought his mind was taking. He lay shivering in the bed, and he found that he was sweating. He at last passed into a haunted sleep.

Dawn found him riding into the rising sun, his belly full with a good breakfast, himself and his horse refreshed by the night's sleep The gale had died away, and the new day promised to be clear and very invigorating. Good time would be made on the route to Medea.

Good time was made.

Close to noon, Rick mounted the pass overlooking Medea. The small city nestled in the snow-filled valley; near by was Jacob's Inn. His horse's breath coming in steamy clouds, he pulled up by the stables; turned his steed over to the stable boy, and hurried into the inn to escape the strong nip of the mountain air He stamped the crusted snow off his boots and entered the dining room looking for Jacob. Although a few people were there, consuming lunch, Jacob wasn't. Rick tried the kitchen...

Jacob was there, busy over the stove. "Jacob!" Rick cried.

The portly innkeeper turned "Eh..." He saw Rick. "Lad!" he bellowed, anxiety and relief in his tones. "Rick, boy, are you all right? Is Ruthalyn all right?"

It was with anger and a hard-repressed bitterness that Rick poured his story out to a sympathetic Jacob...how he had been taken to the Palace; how Roland had solved the mystery of his origin; how Roland had figured the relationship between him and Ruthalyn.

Jacob had grunted over that. But when Rick came to the point about the plans of the Sorcerer Supreme and the Council of Alchemists against the Truthseekers, Jacob nodded sadly. "My son, of this I already know. Aye, boy, the Underground has its spies even within the walls of the Palace. The information you bring is valuable, but we already have it...and I thank you very much for being so loyal to me." Honest pride was in Jacob's deep voice.

"But one thing--disturbs--me, Jacob," began Rick uneasily. "Up to now, I haven't mentioned this. It bothers me. It was something I saw while at the Palace..." and he described how the Legions of Ovarron had galloped ghastly and ghostly blue across the meadow and into the sky; how the God himself had stood like a column of sun-fire.

And, surprisingly, Jacob laughed. Rick looked up in puzzlement; Jacob grinned through his beard and said, "I can imagine your feelings, lad. The Legions of Ovarron are

undeniably frightening. But they cannot hurt you. They could never hurt you. Neither could the Dark Thing; neither could Ovarron himself."

"H- -how do you mean? I swear they were real..."

"Can images projected against controlled clouds of polarized particles hurt you?"

"Wh- -you don't mean...?"

"But I do mean it, lad. Those illusions are purely the invention of Dion Roland. I know of this because one Council member belongs to the Truthseekers. He says that the Sorcerer Supreme worked twelve years over an electronic device, and that it can produce many and frightening mirages. I can grasp its principle slightly because I was an Alchemist for a long time, as I have told you, and my training enables me to understand these illusions at least partially. What most perplexed me was **how** the Sorcerer Supreme could have made such a thing. He is an amazing man, truly, but no science on all Earth compares to his. But with your explanation that he comes from some other kind of space...I begin to understand his abilities."

Jacob scrutinized Rick speculatively. Finally he boomed, "About yourself, lad...you too come from another 'continuum'. Lad- -if you could get your memory back, the success of the Truthseekers might conceivably be assured."

"It all depends," cautioned Rick, "On my reactions after regaining my identity. In exchange for my old memory, my memory of life here in Satania might be blotted out."

Jacob tugged at his beard. "Nevertheless, lad, it's nice to daydream about using some fantastic Weapon of your creation to smash the Alchemists."

Rick found himself grinning. They talked long; into the afternoon, into the night and consumed many mugs of ale. And Jacob outlined a plan for Rick. "Although we know not when Roland intends to attack us, we have a vague idea. Yet a vague idea is not enough. We must know the precise date of the Sorcerer Supreme's program else we will suffer heavily. You, lad, are in his confidence. Think you that you can get the date from him?"

"I can't be sure."

"Understandable, lad," Jacob boomed. "But you can try. It will help the Truthseekers tremendously."

"I intend to try."

"I'm proud of you, lad," Jacob said finally. "To me you are a son. A brave loyal son."

"Thank you, Jacob."

"Well, lad, you might as well go to bed now. It will be a long and hard ride tomorrow and you will need much rest. Be sure to give Ruthalyn all my sympathy and all my love when you get back."

"I promise, Jacob."

So he went to bed, feeling enormously better. But both he and Jacob were mercifully unaware of the fact that walls are thin and behind them can conceivably lurk ears.

VII

Before Dawn cast her blazing pennons above the eastern horizon, a lone horseman thundered away from Jacob's inn, heading for the ocean and the Palace of the Sorcerer Supreme. Damning knowledge was his...

Some hours later, Rick too left Jacob's inn, filled with breakfast, to take the same course the first horseman had traversed. More at his leisure, he spent several days in crossing the Great Valley and

riding up the peninsula to the Palace of the Sorcerer Supreme.

Upon his arrival he was seized.

Five minutes later he was in a dungeon.

Furiously Dion Roland paced his chambers. "So the man Rick is in the dungeons?" he growled.

"That he is, my Lord," said Valin softly.

"And you can vouch for the honesty of that Agent?"

"Fully, my Liege."

Roland sighed. "And I had thought I'd converted the man Rick to my cause. This should be a lesson for me. There remains nothing to do but send a squad out to capture this innkeeper, Jacob Melville."

"True, my Lord."

"You can attend to that, Valin. In the meantime, notify Lady Ruthalyn that I wish to see her."

"Immediately, Liege of mine." Valin left.

Ten minutes later, Ruthalyn had arrived; her bearing proud and her face flaming. Roland cleared his throat and said slowly, "I have some unpleasant news for you."

She sniffed. "I wondered. I hope it is an explanation for your actions of a few nights ago."

Roland winced. How could he put it forth to her? That suspicion in him...swelling and pounding and horrible in its implications? He breathed deeply. "No, this news isn't an explanation...but you deserve an explanation and I'll give you one first. But firstly...you told me you don't remember your parents. This is true?"

Her eyes narrowed. Roland's intense hazel gaze matched hers. She at last dropped her eyes and said, "It is true."

"Where did Jacob Melville find you?"

"Papa Jacob picked me up from the streets of Medea around nineteen years ago. I--was--only a few weeks old and nearly dead. Hulda..."

Weakness swept across Roland. "Ruthalyn..." he said softly, so softly, that she looked up in surprise, "Let me see your left hand."

She gave it to him. On the back of her left hand was the small crescent-shaped mole she was wont to rub when in thought. A very distinctive shape for a mole His face suddenly emotionless. Roland held out his own left hand.

There was a duplicate mole under his golden fuzz. "Daughter," he said woodenly.

Her eyes flew wide and she reeled back a few steps "F--father!" It was too much. She began to crumple in a swoon, but Roland caught her and laid her out on a couch.

To him it was all hideously clear. Things fell into place like a jigsaw puzzle. The passionate night with Sylvia of Medea had been a fruitful night. Conception had been attained. And Sylvia was just the type who would throw away an unwanted child. So Ruthalyn had been born to be cast away and left to die.

But, Rick? What position did Rick occupy in this terrible triangle? All three--Rick, Roland, and Ruthalyn --resembled one another strikingly. Who, then, was Rick? He had come from another continuum...was he but another pawn in some abominable plan of Fate?

A suspicion came to Roland. A suspicion of the truth concerning Rick's relationship to the trinity questionable. It had to be tested... Rick had to be tested...

A voice from behind him, small and lost and piteous. "I--I--want to go...home."

He returned impassionate eyes on

his daughter. "You are my child. This is home."

"I. . ." Her eyes were despairing.

Brutally, Roland cut her off. "Here is the bad news. Jacob was found to be a member of the Truthseekers. A squad is being sent to capture him. Rick, also, was found guilty of treason. He is in the dungeons now. I can do nothing but consider you, also, a member of the Truthseekers unless you can satisfactorily prove otherwise. So you will be kept here- - but if you behave you will be treated well- - daughter."

"I. . ." She could say no more. Sobbing she ran from the room. His countenance like granite, Roland stared at the spot she had vacated for long minutes. Only one face remained clear in the maelstrom within his mind.

Doris.

O,Doris, I should never have broken my faith to you.

Doris. . .

Rick Roland smiled humorlessly as he drew the connection. If Rick were truly Dion Roland, twenty years younger, he would fit into the hateful trinity. And he should at least have had his own Doris. If her name were mentioned, how would he react? Suppose Doris was the key to his submerged past?

And if she was, and if in the process of regaining his memory, Rick lost his Rick-identity to become Dion Roland no. 2, then he could be very valuable. Power. . .

His eyes chill caverns, he headed for the dungeons.

Rick sat in his cell. It was very dark and very dank. A rotted corpse was stretched out across the other end of the cramped floor. The fetidity had already caused Rick to retch twice. It didn't aid the odor any. The blackness itself was stifling. The only light was reflected light coming from a flickering torch around a bend in a corridor fifty yards away. It was obvious that the Alchemic clan hated the Truthseekers.

Torch-glimmerings, drawing nearer. Footsteps drove their sound through the foul darkness. Around the bend in the corridor appeared Dion Roland and two guards. They said nothing and Rick said nothing. He merely watched as they opened his cell. He put up no resistance when they hustled him out. He was brought to Roland's chambers.

He was seated, and Roland faced him. The Sorcerer Supreme got directly to the point. "I want to find out who you are, Rick."

Eyes feral, Rick glared at him.

"Will you co-operate?"

"Why should I?"

"I think I can bring your memory back."

A crafty delight grew in Rick. With his memory returned. . .he might be able to fulfill Jacob's wistful 'daydream'. He shrugged slowly and said, "All right. I'm interested."

And he wondered at the odd look in Roland's eyes. The man's shock of golden hair was tousled and he looked like he'd just been through some terrific strain. Even more did Rick wonder when Roland said softly, "Before you were tossed into this continuum, there was a woman. You loved her. Do you remember her?"

"What do you mean?"

Silently Roland extended his left hand. On it was the mole. Rick held out his own hand. There was an identical mole, identically placed. His eyes became questioning. "Wh. . ."

"There was a woman," repeated Roland. "Tall and smiling-eyed and very beautiful. Her figure was one great flame which could consume

any man. Her hair was dark and long and had the texture of silken ebony. Her eyes were coals green and intense. They could tear out your soul and wrench it past repair.

"Her lips were Heaven. And they have met yours. They have torn you asunder and fused you together. She was utterly yours and you were utterly hers."

Uneasiness skittered in the back of Rick's mind. Formless recollections which gathered and surged and shattered behind some blinding mental Wall. Profound recollections surging and frothing; waves screaming to burst that searing psychic Wall.

Rick found that he was sweating. Uncertainty was reflecting in his gaze.

Grimly, Roland continued, "Yes, yours. A love beyond all love. A woman who was a dark-haired nymph of ecstasy. Surely you remember her."

"Surely you remember Doris."

"Doris!"

"DORIS!"

Rick's features twisted. Where his brain had been there was a flare. First a pinpoint--then a sun--then a vast soundless blazing ocean which swallowed him up and battered his screaming mind through the essence of Chaos. Then the sea of psychic conclusion sundered outwards; flowing, cracking, shattering...all simultaneously; fading, waning, leaving a horrible lightless void. Into which memories seeped. A confused memory of a room and a bed; beside him a woman incredible...an uneasiness, warm feet on a cold floor, chill winds and a balcony...a streak in the skies...

Pain. His mind recoiled. It retreated into the void.

Up loomed a Face. Beauty of delirium.

Beauty beyond delight. Doris.

A yearning yowled like a whirlwind through him, torturing every fibre in his being, leaving an ache bursting in his chest. Doris.

A voice from beyond infinity. Murmuring susurrus of a distant sea. **You remember Doris.**

I remember Doris. To it there was no sound. It was purely mental. His mind was still toppling into the abysmal chasm of uncovered memory. It was still screaming in the delirium of Doris.

Other memories, flashing past. Laboratories extensive and gleaming and familiar. Faces, wraithlike in their quality; solidifying; with them materialized names...Hartgivesen. Eckman, Jordan...

Locations. San Francisco Fairycity, sky-high spires soaring; writhing ramps between buildings weaving, aircars multitudinous and groundcars swarming, the Bridge immense arcing across the bay...

Mountains; the Sierra Nevadas... a spaceport, New Town, prefabricated buildings clustered around a wide field of poured duralloy...nestling between crags, a roost for the Birds of Space, the Moonshuttles which came and went twice daily, Earthwards growling and Lunawards screaming...

Paper work and involved mathematics...ream after ream of symbols correlated on white glossy cards --a computer with a thousand eyes and a thousand ears staring emotionlessly--courses for the Birds of Space flapping out in profusion... orbital velocities, planetary trajectories, mass-thrust ratios, fuel consumption and loss...

A name. Dion Roland. I. Me. Myself. Features seen in a mirror, in photographs--in the yearbook of the College in Syrtis Major, a picture of I Me Myself Rick-Roland

Rick-Dion, smiling, aged nineteen, holding a diploma...

Newspapers; a picture of Rick-Roland Rick-Dion laughing, darting through a rain of rice, holding the hand of a woman stunning. Doris. Doris Roland. She-nineteen, I twentyone. My wifemywifemywife...

A prefabricated house functional and beautiful, with one delightful anachronism; a balcony. Theirs Rick-Dion's and Doris's. To live in, to be happy in, a home from where to watch the Birds of Space come in and take off; a home maintained by a job in the computer room of Central Control in New Town...

Theirs! And ahead a bright future. Room for advancement, promotion, higher salary...endless golden-hazy years to be with Doris...

A night. Glorious night, joyous night; I Rick-Dion just turned twentytwo; Doris so happy and now twenty...winds so cold past my naked form whipping In the Sky a Bird of Space descending like the legendary Phoenix. Concussion! Annihilation! A grim picture of a mushrooming cloud birthed in a blinding shock-wave of expanding blue madness. A sullen grim cloud rearing like a frowning sentinel above square leagues and square leagues of flattened, ravaged, burned, devastated earth...

Doris. In that she was. In **that.** Painpainpainpainpain.....

There was pain in Rick's eyes as he got to his feet. Dion Roland saw that haunted, wild look and held his silence. It was infinitely more expressive than words Rick remembered. Every last detail. He knew who he was and he retained his Rick-identity.

He knew the Paradise he had lost.

Roland extended his hand. "I'm truly sorry, I know how it is. I went through the same hell, you must remember."

Rick did not take the offered hand. He gave Roland his fist. Full in the face; Roland was hurled five feet backwards, shattered teeth gushing from his split lips. The two guards were instantly active. One went down as a knee met his groin with blurring speed. The other raised a club...

And was sent crashing to the floor by a judo flip. He lay twitching hideously, his back bent the wrong way.

Grimly Rick took the dying man's club. He knew he had to escape. The Truthseekers needed him. Desperately. An attack had to be planned, organized, executed. Speedily.

He looked at the unconscious Roland. He and Roland were one and the same person. With quick motions, Rick stripped Roland of his robes. Leaving the chambers, he made haste toward the roof. In the robes of the Sorcerer Supreme, it was impossible to tell him from Roland

He reached the roof without question. There were helicopters. He got into one, gunned the controls, and hurtled up into the darkening skies.

Night found the helicopter concealed in a forest clearing. Also it found Rick, divested of the robes of the Sorcerer Supreme, making his way down into Medea. He had one slight link through which he might possibly contact the Truthseekers - -Jacob's friend. Jacob's friend, who had helped the stout innkeeper carry the naked Rick to the inn.

Rick didn't know the man's name. And he only vaguely remembered the face...the day of his "arrival" seemed to be ages past. But he was determined. He would search. And search.

The mountain gale was icy. It drove him at a trot into the glazed cobbled streets of the mountain village. It drove him into a tavern. Song and warmth poured out the tavern entrance into the street. Dim light was provided by a big fire. At the bar men drank and jested and sang. Women joined some of them.

Rick checked and found he had a little spare money. He ordered a mug of ale and carefully scrutinized every person in the place. None, however, struck a responsive chord in his memory.

His mind was a whirlpool of blending images; Forms rising out of his other life to haunt him. He didn't like it. He tried to drown the horribly mocking memories. He tried to abolish the face of Doris; so beautiful she hurt...

He thought of Ruthalyn. Then there stirred in him the beginnings of hope. If he, Rick, was Dion Roland--**then he was not Ruthalyn!** Hope became exultation. He **must** contact the Truthseekers. He, Rick, had graduated with high honors from the College in Syrtis Major, specializing in chemistry and physics. The Truthseekers needed him desperately for his knowledge. The Alchemists would be shattered, Ruthalyn would be freed and she would be his.

Lazy-sultry, the face of Doris materialized before his eyes. A woman of flame. Of understanding and ecstasy and love. Intelligent, warm, gorgeous.

Gone forever.

He ordered some more ale.

He ordered some wine.

He ordered a jug of whiskey.

He started telling himself how lucky he was. Not only had he regained his memory of his own continuum--he had retained his Rick-identity. Suppose his memories of being Rick had been destroyed? Suppose he had become the tool of Dion Roland?

Yes, Fate smiled on him. He swilled the whiskey to celebrate his luck. Then there seemed to be a man and a woman with him. The woman was plump. There were tears in her eyes.

"Rick," she said.

Yes, he was very lucky. He told her how lucky he was. He lifted the jug to his lips.

She just looked at him. "What happened, Rick," she asked.

Then he didn't remember her. Only a vague impression of lying face-first in a snowbank a hundred yards from the inn and strong hands dragging, dragging...

Then darkness.

When the sun reached its zenith he awoke. He was not concerned with his surroundings. All he was worried about was the fact that his tongue was a desert; that a thunderstorm raged in his skull, and that his muscles felt like tissue paper.

Even the voice which soothed, "Easy, fellow--you nearly killed yourself" did not register with him until two full minutes had passed.

And he hardly had the energy to be surprised when he saw the very man he had been looking for... only strangely out of focus. His eyes wandered in the most irritating fashion, crossing and uncrossing. But dimly, behind the man, he could make out a form which might have been Jacob's wife, Hulda.

He dropped back into sleep. Sleep was Euphoria.

Things would turn out all right.

VIII

The hall was large and richly tapestried; the table it contained

was very broad and long. Papers littered the table, and drinks; containers of water and wine and ale. And men sat around it. Men in resplendent robes who quietly sat and looked at their leader. They were the Alchemists. The Council was in session.

Dion Roland was roaring. "So the man Rick escaped. His sympathies lie with the Truthseekers. . .and with the knowledge he possesses, he is a quadruply dangerous threat to Empire. He knows all I know

"Time functions against us. Our attack against the Truthseekers must of necessity be drastically altered. I had planned a certain date to attack; but now my plans are all useless. The pogrom must be launched immediately. This very night. Within the hour.

"It is going to be a precarious undertaking. I am forced to inaugurate my war too soon. I am just as unprepared as the Truthseekers. There will be no strategy involved in the coming battle It will be pure brute madness And it is likely that our forces will be dangerously weakened.

"I do not like it. But it is necessary. And victory is certain to be ours because our force is vastly huger. Nevertheless, this thing is something which no provisions were allowed for. It is a sneak blow which has seriously staggered Empire.

"This means that the next few months will be desperate ones. We will have two monstrous jobs to do. We will have to eliminate the surviving Truthseekers AND rebuild our forces before the dictators in the lands of the Warlocks take advantage of our misfortune.

"The reasons are obvious even to a child. Surviving Truthseekers spell a potential threat from within. The Warlock empires are a very concrete threat from without. To cope with one, the other must be removed. So we must exterminate the Truthseekers.

"Clear?"

Valin, by his side, somberly nodded. One of the Alchemists got to his feet. "Very well. The attack must be launched soon You are the commander- -give us the order."

"Action is to be taken within ten seconds," answered Roland.

The man nodded. "Our concubines can wait. Shall we gather forces? I command the Succubia garrisons; they are ready for instant action."

"Good," approved Roland. "The New Cagliostro guards are already on the alert. All they need will be a signal. A house-to-house search will instantly be launched. All roads from the city are already blocked. And I trust that all the rest of you have alerted your forces for immediate action?"

All of them nodded. The first spokesman said, "But a word is all that's needed."

"Excellent. The same procedure used in New Cagliostro will be followed in every city and town in Satania. Already all the garrison chieftains have explicit instructions for locating Underground conclaves. Enough Truthseekers will be captured so that torture will worm from them the names of all the others."

The Alchemists gave each other bored glances. Hard work was something they disliked. But they knew necessity when they saw it. Roland glared at them- -and suddenly bellowed, "Councilman Edwards, please stand up."

Councilman Edwards, a thin and tall man, nervously got to his feet. "Defend yourself," Roland said abruptly.

He twitched. "Wh. . .what is your meaning, my Lord?"

"You know damned well. Valin caught you in an illegal act--communicating with the Truthseekers."

"My Liege, it is a lie!"

"Like hell it is. What have you to say for yourself, Councilman?"

"I know not of what you speak, my Lord. . ."

From his robes Roland drew a pistol. An ugly gleaming thing. It levelled at Councilman Edwards. "I myself have been watching you for some time, Councilman Edwards," began Roland calmly. "And it is quite obvious that you are one of Empire's prime security leaks. You have remained alive only because you are of potential value to Empire. Tell me now--will you join our forces or will you face the 'persuasion' chambers?"

Councilman Edwards paled, but said, "Never!" Hardly had his words come out than a dagger miraculously appeared in his fist, the keen blade driving for his heart

The gun in Roland's grip spoke with flame and thunder.

And Councilman Edwards sank to the floor with a shattered hand.

Roland addressed the rest of the Alchemists, "Our major security leak has just been plugged. Our pogrom still has the faint advantage of catching the Truthseekers by surprise. Nevertheless, we ourselves are just as unprepared in launching this attack as they are in warding it off. Matters are grim.

"You may now leave. Take Councilman Edwards with you. You know where to leave him and you know your duties. Don't dawdle."

They left in an unhurried rush.

Valin looked into his Liege's haggard, bruised face. "My Lord. . .?"

"Yes, Valin?"

"You perplex me. You said the man-Rick knew all you knew. How can this be?"

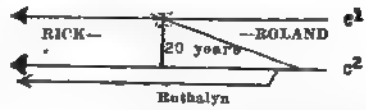
Roland began pacing. "I might as well tell you, Valin. Get me a drink."

Valin poured some wine and gave it to Roland. He downed it in a single swallow and tenderly wiped his bruised, swollen lips. He sighed, and said, "The simple fact is that the man Rick is myself. And when I say myself, I mean precisely that."

Valin goggled speechlessly. Roland grinned faintly, asked, "Do you remember when I explained to you a certain theory of mine? One about many continuums co-existent with one another?"

"Very well, my Lord."

Roland seized a sheet of paper from the table, picked up a pen and drew a diagram:



C^1 (Home of Rick-Roland)

C^2 (Continuum of Satania)

"C^1," Roland explained, "represents the continuum originally mine--for you see, Valin, I am not a native to this continuum. That is why my scientific abilities are vastly superior to yours." Disregarding Valin's awed expression, Roland continued, "C^2 stands for this continuum--Satania. As things were, **something** happened in my own continuum--something of sufficient power to blast me through the barriers between co-existent universes. This by itself might not have been too bad--but, sorrowfully, that wasn't the case. Not only did that blast knock me between continuums--somehow it either divided or duplicated me. One of me was thrown twenty years into Satania's past--or one of me was thrown the same

distance into Satania's future twenty years ago. Nevertheless, the 'me' who arrived first retained his memory and was able to put his superior knowledge to work. He climbed to the summit of power He made only one mistake in all his career--and that was a night of passion a long time ago. It resulted in a daughter whom I knew nothing about.

"This daughter was adopted and she grew up. She happened to be around when the other of 'me', Rick, arrived Rick's arrival is the reason for the titanic electrical discharge detected over Medea She took Rick into her care...and you know the rest. And..." An ironic smile twisted his battered face, "...it appears I'm at war with myself now."

Valin was silent for a while; at last nodded slowly. "I--think--I understand, my Lord"

Roland ceased his endless pacing and took a seat. "The next few weeks are going to be very dangerous, Valin," he mentioned.

"Why? The Truthseekers?"

"Yes, the Truthseekers. You know as well as I that many of them are going to escape the pogrom. It will be inevitable. I am launching my attack far too soon--but as you know, it is being launched out of necessity. With the man Rick on the side of the Truthseekers, the whole foundation of Empire is threatened. We have to strike.

"And we are striking. This very moment. Devastatingly. The Truthseekers will be terribly weakened. But they will be desperate. And in their deperation, I fear they will attempt something dangerous."

"Like what, my Lord?"

"Like an all-out attack against this Palace. Remember, friend, that this edifice represents the concentration of Alchemic power. It is from here that Empire is directed. Seize this fortress and you also seize Empire.

"That fact by itself shouldn't worry us too much. Yet it is worthy of reasonably serious consideration, and it was because of the possibility of an all-out attack against this palace that I wished to start this pogrom at a much later date. I had wanted to install adequate defense measures all along the Peninsula. A precaution. But because of the man Rick, I have no time to establish my 'Precaution'.

"This building, as you well realize, is nearly impregnable. But the man Rick casts doubts as to our impregnability. He is me. He knows what I know. He can fashion an explosive far more powerful than our crude gasoline and gunpowder. It is called nitroglycerine. It is an oily, explosive liquid--an organic compound --made by treating glycerine with nitric and sulfuric acids and involving a long process of 'washing' the acids out with sodium hydroxide. It is a highly unstable compound, and a terrible explosive. Were I to drop a quart of it in this room, the whole Palace would be blown into rubble.

"Because I know how to make this explosive, the man Rick knows how also. If he escapes the pogrom --and if he manages to remain in contact with the Truthseekers--he will be able to make much of this and use it to make an explosive called dynamite. Armed with that, the Truthseekers can wage a devastating attack and more than hope for success. Worse, using dynamite against them will be futile because their forces are sure to be widely dispersed and they have nothing worth smashing."

Valin protested, "But, my Liege--all this is based on ifs. If the man

Rick escapes the pogrom and if he keeps in touch with the Truthseekers."

"Never underestimate your opponents, Valin, and never assume that Fate will frown upon them--especially when your life and your way of life are at stake. If those ifs come true, you won't even live to curse the fact."

Valin considered. At last he nodded. "Yes, my Lord, I see your point. We dare not assume the man Rick died. We dare not assume the Truthseekers will not utilize his aid In short--we must prepare for battle."

Roland nodded grimly. "Exactly. For battle. And when it is all over, we must exterminate the Truthseekers more thoroughly than the Followers of Christ were at the hands of the Cult of Pluto. We must--lest they who escape start the mess all over again."

A sly light crept into Valin's eyes. "All but one, my Liege."

"Eh?"

"With your forgiveness, my Lord, may I say that I think you do not care overly much for your daughter?"

Roland frowned. "All right."

"Spare her, my Lord. She would make a fitting concubine for me. And I think I can remove the revolutionary spirit from her veins."

For an instant, Roland's features suggested he was going to murder Valin, then he relaxed. "You deserve her, Valin," he said flatly. "She is yours. Have fun."

Valin rubbed his thin cruel hands. "My deepest thanks and gratitude, Liege of mine."

The air in the cellar was humid. The only illumination came from a few torches hastily slung in improvised cressets. Their smoke made the air acrid. The orange dancing light flickered from twenty stern —and scrutinizing faces. The object of scrutinity was Rick.

Exultation was surging in Rick. —Luck had kissed him--it appeared to be sheer luck that Jacob's wife, Hulda, had been shopping in downtown Medea when her husband had been seized. Tenants fleeing the inn had encountered her on the road to the pass and told her what had happened. So she had returned to Medea to stay with friends...and by chance, she had been helping out at the very tavern where Rick had gotten drunk Upon his return to consciousness, he had found her with another member of the Truthseekers. He had poured out his tale... and now evening found him in a secret Truthseeker conclave.

The Truthseekers knew of him, he was surprised to learn. They had known of him from the lips of Jacob and Hulda. But now they were slightly suspicious because of his apparent connection with Dion Roland. He was trying to alleviate that suspicion.

"Can't you see,' he pleaded, "that with my escape from the Palace, Roland's pogrom will surely be launched with all the haste possible. What we must do is flee. Our strength cannot compare with theirs. They have helicopters, guns, possibly even machine guns--although I can't be sure..."

"What are machine guns?" interrupted a heavy-set fellow. "Guns on machines?"

"No, no..." Exasperatedly Rick explained.

The twenty pairs of eyes regarding him held no compassion. Another man rose and spoke, "We are not sure yet whether we can trust you. But one thing I admit--and that is that your reasoning seems logical ...IF you are everything you claim to be.

"Nevertheless, how can we be sure of your loyalty?"

Just as Rick was about to speak, Hulda got to her feet and said quietly, "I am very sure we can trust him. Jacob told me Rick was very loyal."

Indecision wavered through the group. But not for long. A man burst yelling into the room. "The Guards! The Guards! The whole town's being combed by Alchemic troops!"

Confusion. Men milled around helplessly. And then Rick's tones rang clear and thunderous, "Follow me to the woods. There I have a helicopter. Some of us can escape in it and others of us can escape into the woods!"

Rick at their head, they streamed from the hideout and into the snowbound street. And right down the street was an advancing band of Guards. They had guns. Cruel and cold and glittering

Cries rose in a tumult. And then Rick roared, "Take cover, you fools!" They did- -just as a volley of shots splintered the night.

Warily the Guards advanced. A team of horses hitched to a nearby wagon whinnied nervously, panicked by the noise. Rick and some of the Truthseekers hugged the side of the hideout. Rick saw the horses and saw their possibilities. He whispered fervently to the men behind him, "I'm going to drive those horses through the ranks of the Guards. There aren't more than ten men in their group- -in the confusion, you can charge and overpower the rats. . ."

Agreement. Concern. "Careful, friend. . ."

But Rick was already darting in a crouched run toward the horses. The night was with him. It spoiled the aim of the first volley intended for him. He sprang into the wagon, grabbed the reins, and lashed the steeds into frenzy. They thundered down the iced cobbles toward the Guards Shots whined and thudded. A searing pain ripped along Rick's side- -then his horses were plowing through the men and bloodying the snow. . .

Berserk, they charged across the street. The wagon struck a lamp post and upended crazily, flinging Rick into the midst of the fray. The men of the Underground had attacked; shots and screams were tearing up the night. A few more minutes passed and the confusion of struggle died. The Guards were dead. The Truthseekers had weapons.

A council of war was called, and Rick was undeniably the leader. He told Hulda to remain in Medea. She would not be able to stand the rigors to come. Then to his men, he said, "We must win our way out of the city and into the forest. There I have a helicopter."

Nods. Silent, the band stole along dimly lit streets, their guns shining coldly

They met the Empire cordon surrounding Medea. It was thin. Rick led the charge, oblivious to the pain in his side, his gun bucking and roaring. Fifteen men died in that wild charge- -but the advantage of surprise had been theirs. The living five crashed through. They were close on Rick's heels as he scrambled up the bitter cold mountainside and plunged into the forest.

They raced through the trees, skirting moon-dappled snowy clearings. Through the dark and the cold they slunk, silent as wraiths. Behind, a few futile shots probed the forest.

They reached the helicopter. Five men and Rick. Rick was breathing

heavily, conscious of a warm sticky wetness trickling down his side. "We must warn others of the Truthseekers," he muttered. "We must hide out until this pogrom is over."

"Hide out?" one of the men grunted. "Aint got a bastard of a chance. We've gotta attack or die."

"Not necessarily," Rick said grimly. "Do not forget that I am a scientist. I know far more than any Alchemist. With my knowledge, I'm almost sure I can guarantee the Truthseekers success."

"S'good--but how?"

"Explosives. I can make some very powerful explosives--p o w e r f u l enough to shatter the walls of the Palace of the Sorcerer Supreme. For, you see, men, the key to our victory lies in the Palace. There dwell the Sorcerer Supreme and his Alchemists. They constitute the focal point of the tyranny which grips Satania. Shatter them and you destroy the tyranny. Obliterate them...then we can take over!"

"But it'll take 'ya time."

"Yes, time," admitted R i c k. "Months at least. Let us not waste them. Where shall we go?"

"To Hades!" barked another man. "The Truthseeker garrison there is undectable from the air and almost invincible. It's the headquarters for our entire organization."

"Can you show the way?"

"Surely."

No time was wasted. They piled into the helicopter, and the motors screamed into mighty life. Exhaust kicking great clouds into the chill air, whining rotors bore the helicopter up from the snowblanketed clearing. Up, over the forest, into the black and sunstudded sky. Southwards it droned.

It was far into the small hours of morning. And still reports streamed in continuously. Reports by telegraph from cities all over Satania. The pogrom was under way in full blast. And it was one unbroken story of unleashed hell and human fury. Succubia on the East Coast reported thousands dead. The town was in glaring flames. Mobs rioted in the streets; both Empire guards and men of the Truthseekers. Mingling, fighting, bellowing...a veritable explosion of human emotion conflicting hideously. The same tale poured in from other cities--cities near the Ocean-lakes in the northeast--towns in the Central Plains--cities around the shores of the Small Ocean between Satania and Warlock I...

All Satania was in a state of turmoil. A very pale and haggard Dion Roland scanned the inflooding reports and ran big shivering hands through his golden mane. Valin, too, was uneasy. "My Lord," he choked out, "Are--are you sure we're not irrevocably weakening ourselves? Dear Ovarron, but I had never imagined the Truthseekers to be so numerous..."

"Shut UP, Valin!" growled Roland. He looked uneasily at the reports again. He, too, was wondering.

Dawn came and relentlessly the Earth spun on. In came the reports, unceasing and flooding and gruesome. Noon, evening...the flood turned into a trickle. A pile grew stating "Truthseekers defeated; many prisoners taken, although few escapees still at large." From all over Satania the reports came. Always escapees.

Roland scowled. Trouble makers they would be. The nucleus for a new Underground. The seed which would flower in the next generation and try to smother the Alchemists.

But the Truthseekers had been quite thoroughly defeated.

Dizzy with triumph, he got to his

feet. His eyes were great dark blazing hollows. He had gone fifty hours without sleep.

He crumpled to the floor. But his dreams were the dreams of the victor.

IX

For many hours, Ruthalyn Melville had been sobbing in her room. Ever since the horrible instant when she had learned that Dion Roland was her father, her entire personal universe had cracked asunder. In mere weeks, two loves had been destroyed. First her Rick-love; a tender emotion birthed in sympathy and forged in understanding...

Only to be crushed.

Then the passion-love for Dion Roland. A man mature and masculine and forceful; a cushion for her tortured feelings, emotions a consuming flame...

A flame which was quenched. Utterly. Positively. Ultimately. Because he was her father. The shock had been too much. From that instant on, the hours had slid past in a near-delirium of tortured feelings. Then a hazy respite of troubled sleep- -and more long hours of suffering.

She came to her senses at last; looked about her with tear-reddened eyes. There was a knocking at her door. Wondering, she opened it. Valin came into the room. His small black eyes glittered oddly. Without precedent, he said, "You are very beautiful. All disheveled like that."

His attitude puzzled her. "Wh... I..."

"I will see you tonight, Beautiful. Take a bath and change into fresh gowns. Have the bed ready and warmed."

Anger spat from her gaze. "What do you mean?"

Unruffled, Valin replied, "You are my concubine. My slave. Because of the graciousness of His Magical Majesty."

Her eyes widened. "But..."

"Be ready for me tonight, Lovely," Valin said peremptorily. "It has been a trying day for me. I will expect comfort."

Before she could retort, he was gone.

She stood staring at the door for long minutes, anger coursing through her hot young veins. Somehow she sensed that Valin had spoken the truth. It didn't affect her as it might have another woman because she was already tempered by two crushing shocks.

It left only anger in her. Rage and determination. She would have no part of what Valin proposed. She suddenly found herself loathing the undersized and vaguely cruel man. Her determination grew, turning her soft lines harsh.

Turning her into some emotionless cold beast.

Dion Roland paced his chambers. Endlessly. His rugged strong features gave an attitude of intense concentration. He was still pacing, lost in thought, when Valin entered.

"You wished to see me, Liege of mine?"

Roland nodded. "Fix some drinks. Have a seat. I have much to say."

Valin went about preparing drinks. "It is very apparent, my Lord. All morning you been thinking."

"Yes. It concerns the Truthseekers. There are certain possibilities in the future which I intensely dislike."

Handing Roland his drink, Valin queried, "Doubtless you mean the likely Underground attack against this Palace?"

The big man sipped at his drink thoughtfully, then rumbled, "That is only part of it. It figures, yes,

but it is not what I was thinking about. Tell me, Valin, what is the wellspring of Empire's might? Do not give me the standard guff about Alchemic knowledge--tell me what are the concrete foundations for our power."

Valin pondered. At last, he said, "I would say that Empire's material foundations are composed of four major things."

"What?"

"Troops, guns, helicopters, and dams. Am I right Lord?"

"I couldn't have given a better answer. The trouble is, Valin, that we depend overly much on those four things. Without troops, Satania would die. Without helicopters, we would be fantastically weak. Without guns we would surely perish. And without dams...

"Without dams there would be no electricity for us. And it is a vital part of the Palace--electric power, I mean. My point should now be obvious. Remember that only one hydroelectric plant serves the entire western coast of Satania--the dam in Southern Lucifer."

Valin grunted. "Then, my Lord, you mean..."

"That the dam will probably become the focal point of a Truthseeker attack. They can greatly cripple us by demolishing the dam. And when I say demolish, I mean it. It won't do just to cut power lines. Even as we have crippled them, so must they cripple us. I am afraid they may try to blast the dam."

"Your reasoning is sound, my Liege, but surely we have no cause for fear. It would be but a simple matter to station a barricade around the dam..."

"You overlook something. It would take no less than a thousand men to man a barricade of the required size. Both sides of the dam must be defended."

"But...surely...Empire troops number well over a thousand..."

"What is the total manpower of the Empire Guards?"

"Let me think--ah, yes, slightly over two hunderd thousand men, my Lord."

"Correct. An army of two hundred thousand, taken by itself, is big. But spread across a country as large as Satania, it becomes very small. On the whole western seaboard, there are not more than seventy-five thousand Guards. Less than that, most likely, because many have perished in the pogrom. These Guards, as you know, represent the forces of law and order in some one thousand towns and cities. The average is seventy-five men to a town. Not very many. It took the help of the ignorant populace to put the pogrom across the way we did. The point here is that we can call in troops only at the expense of weakening the police patrols of all too many towns. It will be necessary, I can assure you--and if we could take in men from all over Satania, it wouldn't be too bad. But here another problem confronts us. Transportation. Only the Alchemists drive gasoline-powered land vehicles. All the rest of Satania depends on horses. This restricts us to drawing our troops only from the Western Coast. And when you think of that, remember that the Palace squadron of five hundred men will need to be supplemented with another thousand. Horses cannot meet our demands in time."

"But...my Lord, what about helicopters?"

"You forget something, Valin--both our helicopters and our fuel are limited. You know as well as I that all Satania has no more than two

hundred helicopters. They serve little better purpose than the transporting of tax collectors to various towns. To a lesser degree, they keep the population in awe of us. And their seating capacity is extremely small. They would not offer any significant help toward the transporting of troops.

"All this infuriates me. How I curse the Alchemic setup, Valin! It is a muddled, doddering and inefficient mess. These past fifteen years I've done my best toward improving it, but those of the Council are ever the fools. I show them how to make helicopters powered by those crude gasoline engines of theirs. They leap at the idea. But when I suggest they turn out at least five thousand machines, they shake their heads. 'Two hundred,' they claim, 'is enough.' They do not wish to expend good materials into what appears a futile venture. I offer them mass-production methods and they sneer. The blind stupid bastards...

"The trouble with them, Valin, is that they were never required to face an emergency. They do not realize the value of mechanical power like I do. Manpower amply supplied with guns is good enough for them. And it is pathetic.

"Without emergency, there exists among them no sense of improvement. This is also true because there is no competition. We happen to have a slight edge over the lands of the Warlocks technologically, and instead of trying to lengthen this edge, the Alchemists lean back on their fannies in the security of competitionless idiocy.

"The result is a hideously crude technology. The survival potential of our Empire is the highest when compared with the rest of this Earth--but compared with my Earth, it is almost nil. But these facts do not worry me so much as the knowledge that the man Rick, if he still lives, will grasp them also. He will take steps."

"And what are you ultimately driving at, my Lord?" asked Valin.

Roland smiled without humor. "As I've mentioned before, chances are things we cannot afford to take. So now we have two problems on our hands: how to defend the dam at Southern Lucifer and the Palace as well. The dam will require about a thousand men. The Palace will take on a thousand more plus its regular complement of five hundred. The placement of troops must be attended to right away. Ten men-- ten high-ranking Guards--are to be taken from two hundred towns. One thousand will be sent to the dam at Southern Lucifer, where they shall start building the barricade. The other thousand will be sent over here where a plan of defense will be worked out. Ten more men will be taken from every Guard garrison in every town on the Western Coast. That will make about twenty thousand troops. Their duties will be to patrol the telegraph lines of the Western Coast. You, Valin, are to talk over their placement with the SupCom of the Guards."

"Very well, my Lord."

"Do you grasp my meaning?"

"Too well, Liege of mine. If the man Rick has survived, our position is little short of desperate."

"Exactly. But there is one thing which will increase the efficiency of the Palace defenses a million-fold."

Valin swallowed. "Is...eh...this true, my Lord?"

"Remember my projection equipment? I'm going to prepare a series of really horrble projections. They will surpass even the illusions of the Legions of Ovarron and the Dark

Thing. Our strongest defense may well lie in these projections because, enlightened as the leaders of the Truthseekers are, the vast bulk of their recruits are still highly superstitious. Such horrible sights as I will prepare for them will surely frighten away the majority of their army and leave such a small remainder that victory can be ours without effort. And such a scare will have been given those who flee that the Alchemists might conceivably remain in power for decades to come without fear of rebellion. They will most assuredly spread their tale of horror all across Satania."

Valin rubbed his thin evil hands. "Brilliant, my Lord. With you at the reins of Empire, we cannot but help to be carried to victory. I can so clearly imagine it...thousands of ignorant ones fleeing in terror from thin air!"

Roland grinned. "You'd enjoy it, all right. Well...you have my plans. Contact the SupCom of the Guards and give him these..." He handed Valin a sheaf of papers. "They contain all I've talked to you about regarding the placement of troops. I'll attend to the projection equipment.

"Also inform the Council of the planned placement of forces, and how I intend to rely on the projection equipment."

"Wholly clear, Liege of mine. May I leave?"

Roland surveyed him keenly; downed his remaining liquor in a single swallow. "You're quite eager to leave. You've been fidgeting like a child for the past ten minutes." Roland smiled knowingly. "A new concubine, I trust?"

Valin returned the grin, his cold lips twitching. "Precisely, my Lord. And allow me to thank you again for the gift."

Roland smiled after the man's receding back.

The helicopter droned high above the coastline, the glowing buttresses of the new dawn tingeing the surf with mist of rose Cold air filled the vehicle; ahead and below lay the few scattered buildings which composed the minor port of Hades. Over the town the helicopter roared, heading for an odd rocky formation jutting in insensate might out into the pounding sea.

It was, Rick soon learned, the Truthseeker's national headquarters.

The Garrison was a series of caverns and chambers hollowed out of a gigantic squarish boulder. It was a very efficient hideout, so perfectly camoflouaged that no suspicions would be aroused even fifty yards off. Because it was supplied by boats, telltale roads were dispensed with.

The helicopter landed on the beach. Men rushed out of the Garrison with ready guns, but it was a matter of instants to make clear the fact that the riders were fellow Truthseekers. Rick and his companions piled out, and soon after, a small gasoline-engined tractor chuffed out of a well-concealed cavern and dragged the 'copter back inside with the aid of a tow line. The leader of the armed 'welcoming party' approached Rick and asked, "Anything or anybody you want to do or meet in particular?"

One of Rick's companions said to Rick, "Y'might as well ask t'see th Chief. Guy's th head o' th hull bunch of Truthseekers."

Rick grinned. "Might as well. Lead on, friend."

With his companion and the armed leader, he strode up to a concealed entrance. The guards passed them instantly with friendly greet-

ings. Then they were striding up a long, smooth and well-lit cavern. Rick was mildly surprised to find electric lights illuminating his way. He asked the leader about them.

The man shrugged. "The little kaboozles were cooked up by the heads of the organization. They said they secretly tap 'lectric power from the cables leading away from the dam at Southern Lucifer- -whatever the hell that's supposed to mean."

Rick was hard-put to repress chuckles. "Thanks anyway," he replied.

Then they were before the office of the Chief. The armed leader pushed his way inside without announcement; the Chief looked up from his desk, only mildly interested. The Chief was a big man. He seemed solid not flabby. He was in his middle forties, only his hair was prematurely white. His eyes were light brown and very keen and in them was the light of a prodigious understanding. He gave Rick the impression of a dreamer; a philosopher.

The Chief's gaze rested upon Rick. Suspicion kindled in the powerful brown depths of his eyes....and died. The Chief sighed.

"You are not Dion Roland. You are too young."

"Hell, no," Rick's companion explained. "Th lad's a fine chap. Hell, if it'dnt been fer 'im, we'dnt be here now. Bums nearly riddled us at'th Medea joint."

The Chief nodded. "I think I understand." His focus once again returned to Rick. "Are you," he asked, "the man who is responsible for the Sorcerer Supreme's premature attack against us?"

"I am," Rick confirmed quietly.

The Chief sighed, his chin on one big fist. "I don't know whether to be thankful or boiling mad. Roland caught us off balance. In a very real sense, the Truthseekers are a hopelessly shattered organization. A half-century of toil was ripped apart in one night of madness."

"I was afraid of such," Rick sympathized. "Yet I can hardly blame Roland. I even feel a little sorry for him now. It is because I think I have the key to turn the Truthseeker's despair into glory."

The Chief pondered. He sighed again. "From all outward appearences, it is probably the truth. Such desperation as Roland has exhibited screams the fact. Also it suggests you are on our side. Are you?"

"I've been with you for a very long time."

"Jacob?"

"Yes, Jacob."

The Chief's eyes grew grave. "You know what happened to Jacob?"

"Captured. I fear."

"Captured, all right. Too bad. I owe Jacob very much. As you will recall, Jacob was once a member of the Alchemic council. At the time I was also a Councilman- -young and vaguely dissatisfied with things. Jacob showed me why I was dissatisfied. It was he who cleared the perversion of the Alchemists from my mind." The Chief slowly took a deep breath. "What have you to offer us?"

Rick paused. "Perhaps much. Perhaps nothing. It all depends on what you have. I need chemicals and equipment. If you don't have them, I might be able to make my own... and I might not."

The Chief got wearily to his feet. "Here we have a laboratory. It is very painstakingly equipped. It is equal to or perhaps even superior to the Alchemic laboratories at the Palace.

"But one thing I must make clear: We must attack the Palace and the

hydroelectric plant in Southern Lucifer very soon. As the Alchemists have incapacitated us, so must we incapacitate them. Otherwise they will crush us. There will be no second chance for freedom."

Rick grimly agreed. "You are right. We must work quickly lest Empire erect impregnable defenses around vital spots."

"If they haven't already," the Chief finished sadly.

The Chief shrugged as if the action would free him of his troubles. It didn't. He sighed and said, "Come on, friend. I'll show you the laboratories. Tell me of this thing you want to prepare."

So as they walked toward the labs, Rick explained the powers of nitroglycerine.

When they reached the labs, the Chief breathed desperately, "That we **must** have."

Rick inspected the laboratories carefully. He was not impressed. In his own continuum, he had worked in a laboratory far huger than the one he now stood in. Both in size and complexity of equipment, the laboratories of the Truthseekers were little more than children's playthings by comparison.

Yet, in their own right, they were quite well-equipped. Even there, however, Rick could see the effects of the splotched science Roland so bitterly cursed. Compounds and series of compounds vital to his own science were lacking. Certain pieces of equipment made themselves evident by their absence and showed clearly the failure of yet other branches of chemistry to bud.

But there was sufficient material and apparatus to compound nitroglycerine.

Rick explained that to the strained Chief. The Chief expressed no wild outburst of joy--but a profound relief visibly filled his frame. "It won't be easy," Rick cautioned. "Nitroglycerine is a fiendish thing. A mere change in temperature will detonate it. The slightest oversight while making it can lead to a disastrous explosion. I will not trust even your best men to imitate my procedure. They are too unfamiliar with the process; do not know enough I fear they might make a slip which would crack this whole garrison, rock that it is, asunder."

The Chief understood. "As a result," Rick continued, "much time will be needed for me to work in. I can turn out no more than three to three and a half pounds of the stuff per day. I dare not work on methods for producing larger daily quantities. I, scientist that I was, have not done extensive work along this particular branch of organic chemistry. As a result, I must necessarily restrict myself to making small quantities.

"This means that whatever plans you wish to set into effect must be held up for two or three months. We must have patience. But it will give us good time to mobilize those few of our members who escaped the pogrom. Also it might lull Empire into a sense of false security which will heighten the effectiveness of our attack when it is ready."

The Chief remained in indecision for long seconds. He at last nodded, his brown eyes resigned. "I see your logic and agree with you. With the weapon you shall give us, our chances for success will be greater than if we attacked senselessly right away.

"Do what you must. We now depend upon you."

In silence, they shook hands.

Ruthalyn Melville had just returned to her chambers after a desolate supper in the Palace's main mess

hall when Valin arrived. He had no need to knock. A master does not announce his coming to his slave.

She glanced up at him, her eyes carven blue ice. She had been sitting in an armchair and enjoying the beauty of the night when Valin came in, and she let all her contempt for him show through. Valin's thin pale lips imitated a smile; behind him lurked that nebulous aura of cruelty. Fingering his rich black silken cape, he commented, "You seem spirited, my dear."

Angrily, she glanced away.

"I enjoy spirited women immensely. And you will find, my dear, that my own vitality is not to be sneered at."

"I'd advise you to get out," she stated coolly.

Valin's pinched features registered mock surprise. "Really?" He rubbed his prominent nose and drawled insultingly, "And who are you, my dear, to go around advising the Advisor to Empire?"

Her features hardened. She concentrated on the beauty of the night, declining to recognize Valin's presence.

"You are very proud," Valin purred. "It will be fun. How I love to watch the wilting of one so arrogant as you."

If anything, her features grew sterner.

"Ah, darling, but you are angry. Your face is mobile You cannot hide your emotions. Proof, beautiful proof, of your spirit."

She heard him get up; heard the rustle of his robes as he moved around the room. A slight shudder passed through her and she wished she had on something warmer than the thin green gown which enhanced her figure. There was a gurgle of liquid; Valin asked softly, "Some wine, my dear?"

She shook her head.

He shrugged, downed a glass. Pouring some more, he walked over to where he could face her. "Soon you may wish you had some," he urged.

All she gave him was a frigid stare. Again Valin shrugged philosophically; downed his wine. "Every second you increase my desire. Tonight shall be Paradise."

"You wouldn't dare..." she began hotly.

"Ah, dear, but I **would**. You neglect the fact that you are mine. In body, at least, if not in mind and soul."

She held her silence, feeling the great emptiness inside her; the icy void which turned her into a hollow being So she was Valin's? So what? Why should she care? Wasn't she forever estranged from happiness...?

She tried to convince herself she was. Her efforts were in vain. Ever and always a face swam up from her memory. Rick. Rick smiling; Rick laughing; Rick concentrating...

He is myself. Myselfmyselfmyself, O, Rick, Ricky, I- -I- -need you...

I cannot have him. He is me. He is my brother and my sister and my mother and my father...

Emotions like molten rock flamed through her.

whywhywhywhy WHY?

Valin's voice, slicing through her self-despair. "Are you ready, my dear? Your master grows impatient."

My master is Rick... "You might as well leave," she told him coldly.

Pain. Something harsh and cruel whipped across her cheek. With a jolt, she came back to her surroundings. Valin was standing before her, his cruel black eyes glittering, his thin deadly hands wring-

ing, writhing, huge white spiders...

Huge white spiders which swept up and fluttered and swished into searing contact with her cheek. She gasped; blood was a red saltiness in her mouth.

"You are mine," hummed Valin.

"I am not!" she hissed...

A fist. Bony, looming, exploding. She picked herself from the floor, fear glinting in her eyes. "You are mine," repeated Valin smoothly. He laughed with a short sharp staccato sound as she wiped her lips and saw blood on her hand.

She backed away. Valin followed. A wall halted her. Valin sneered, walked past her. He turned down the lights until only a half-dusk remained. A hazy amber light suggestive of some bronze-tinged mist. "You are very desirable," crooned Valin.

Fearfully she pressed against the wall. Valin came to her, lay his bony spidery hands on her shoulders. "Verrry beautiful. Loveliness like yours should never be frustrated..."

A clenching. A tearing. Her gowns came away in Valin's fists. The amber mist-like light enhanced incredibly the rounded curves and smooth hollows of her unclothed form. The first glimmerings of terror sparked in her eyes...

To be replaced by some great emotionless calm.

She was, for the instant, no longer Ruthalyn Melville.

She was a chill calculating thing.

"Sooo soft," Valin lilted. "Skin of silken gossamer. You are very desirable. You are mine." He drew her to himself fiercely.

And screamed in pain as four sharp nails slashed red furrows across his cheek. A grim shining crept into his eyes. "Pride!" he breathed between clenched teeth. "Such spirit.. .so lovely to break..." He hit her Hard Full in the mouth. She reeled backwards, eyes not wide with horror but with deadly cold. Calmly she watched Valin's advance.

"Sooo lovely," he was purring. Startlingly, his foot lashed out. A hard boot caught Ruthalyn with blinding pain in her side.

She did not even gasp. She got to her feet and faced the oncoming Valin. Blinded by his perverted lust, the man did not notice that quietly deadly glittering in her eyes. She backed toward her vanity desk. He followed.

She was halted by the edge of the vanity desk. Her hand closed on a long slim thing which keenly shone in the amber glow...

Valin was upon her. He seized her about her waist and passionately drew her unresisting form against his own. "Your perfume..." he gasped with uneven breath, "... O, how it flames in me..." His fervent kisses covered her face, neck, breasts...

Her eyes held not a hint of sympathy or compassion. A ripple of muscles announced her raising arm ...a whistle of air accompanied its remorseless descent...

And Valin tried to scream but could not as the unrelenting dagger drove deep and true through his spinal cord, through his left lung. Blood flew from his month. Spasms racked his slender form. His eyes wide in paralyzed horror, he sank to the already-bloodstained carpet.

He twitched for a good five minutes after he died. And Ruthalyn stood naked over him like some Valkyrie reborn. But there was no triumph in her. Neither was there despair.

There was only a great leadenness, a terrible apathy which suf-

fused her soul and all Infinity. A killing lethargy through which only one thought could drive...

Ricky...Ricky...Ricky...

She was still standing when dawn flamed through the balcony and a palace servant came in to serve the morning meal.

X

Dion Roland slaved far into the night. He had locked himself up in his private laboratories, filled a pipe, lit it, and **thought**. He racked his mind for some illusion so indescribably horrible it would frighten anyone, no matter how courageous...

And to him, inspiration came.

Lovingly he looked at the bulky mass which was his Composer. With it he could arrange the light-color-sound patterns on magnetic tape to be fed into his projection equipment. It had taken years to build the projector and the Composer. Twelve difficult years. The Composer itself was a basically simple mechanism--little more than a mountain of strung-together relays, transistors and condensers arranged to a "control board"...

But Satania had not had such things. It had been up to Roland to make them himself. So he made them himself; painstakingly grinding lenses, processing germanium for transistors, winding coils for u l t r a p o w e r f u l electromagnets. Twelve years it had taken. The end result was his projection equipment and the Composer with which he could create an infinitude of three-dimensional illusions. He had been able to make them because he had been a scientist who had worked with and understood the monster computers which directed complex course-patterns to interplanetary rockets. By comparison, the projection equipment and the Composer were almost childish.

Nevertheless, they could be very effective and bloodless weapons to use against the simple-minded members of the Truthseekers. The illusions could be effective against even those who knew what they were... providing the composed images were extremely carefully constructed.

And Dion Roland was enormously skilled. His fingers flew over the pianolike keyboard of the Composer. The images he built up were recorded on magnetic tape--every vagary of light and sound and dimension. Like any true artist, Roland became so abstracted in his creation that Time became a misty unawareness invisibly slipping past.

Only when dawn crept in through the laboratory window did he realize how long he'd worked.

He stretched himself and yawned. He still had much to do. His creation was far from complete. Several hour's sleep would do him wonders...

At the door, a thunderous knocking. Irritated, he flung it open. "What is it?" he barked angrily at the white-faced servant who confronted him

The man was obviously extremely agitated. "Sir...Sir...oh, my Lord, forgive me if I have disturbed you, but...but..."

"But what?"

"M-my Liege, V-Valin is d-d-dead."

"Say that again," Roland demanded with murderous restraint.

"...Valin is dead. Th-the w-w-woman Ruthalyn d-did it, Sire."

"Lead me to her, man! Don't dawdle!"

They hurried through long corridors into which the gray glimmering of dawn, was only just beginning to seep. In a minute they had

reached Ruthalyn's quarters. Roland burst into the room and stopped as if thunderstruck. He saw Ruthalyn standing numb and nude over Valin, mute tears spilling down her smooth cheeks.

Slowly he strode up to her. "You did this?" he asked tonelessly

Weakly she nodded.

For long moments, Roland just stood. Anger grew in him. A very real and very towering wrath. A wrath which gave nothing for the fact that Ruthalyn was his daughter. For twenty long years, Valin had been just about the closest approximation of a friend Roland had had. The Council feared him. The populace either hated him or was indifferent. Only Valin had understood...

Only Valin...who now lay in a pathetic huddled heap at his feet in a pool of congealed blood.

He slapped Ruthalyn so hard the noise was a loud crack. She gave a little moan and fell sprawling to the floor, her perfect limbs blue with cold. From down the corridor came a thunder of running feet. Two Guards crashed into the room on one another's heels; the first one said breathlessly, "The servants said you wanted us, Sire..."

"I did." Roland pointed to the unconscious Ruthalyn. "She just murdered our Advisor to Empire. Clothe her and throw her into the dungeons."

"Right away, my Lord." They went to work swiftly. His immense shoulders bunched and his face expressionless, Roland watched them bear the unconscious girl off.

He at last looked down at dead Valin with the first twinge of pity he'd felt in a long time. "Good-bye, Valin," he murmured.

You were almost a friend...

He left.

Time passed. A full month glided by. For Rick, the month was one continuous blur of effort. Day after day he sweated and cursed at his task of preparing nitroglycerine. And each day he gleaned a little more of the precious powerful liquid. Under his supervision, men made dynamite with the fluid. It was mixed with sawdust, rolled in paper and firm strong cardboard, and finally formed into crude but hideously efficient dynamite sticks.

One stick was tested a mile downshore. Just one stick, two feet long. It was buried in the sand. The fuse was lighted...

The blast rocked the Garrison; catapulted a stinging column of sand three hundred feet into the skies and gouged a crater five feet deep and ten across.

Yes, it was powerful...

But they had only thirty sticks.

More were needed. Desperately. And Rick labored to satiate that need. Respite never came to him. Not even in sleep because his nights were haunted by Ruthalyn.

Roland also was working. Daily he drove himself to exhaustion because now he had to take over the duties of the deceased Valin. Daily he had to argue with the Council. He managed to lash them into action, and they took over the task of supervising the Palace Guard, the barricade at the dam near Southern Lucifer, and the dispatching of the twenty thousand Guards intended for telegraph-line patrols.

Daily Roland worked with his Composer He checked; revised; improved and re-checked his images. He realized all two well that if the man Rick lived, the palace's greatest defense would lie in his projection equipment. And with the passage of weeks without hint of any Truthseeker activity, Roland was

afraid his fears concerning Rick had been realized. It also meant that the Truthseekers, even after being dealt a crippling blow, were well-organized. It meant that their attack, when it came, would be a precision-planned thing.

The projections, Roland fervently hoped, would throw a monkey wrench into their precision.

On and on he slaved He installed huge gasoline engines and storage batteries in his projection room; coupled them to generators. He wouldn't take a chance on his power-supply failing. Every possibility had to be considered.

Ruthalyn Melville had lived through ten eternities.

Ten eternities in a place of cold and damp and dark. In a lightless realm where small repulsive creatures scuffled and scurried. Where nauseating odors held fearsome sway Where a meager portion of water and bread crusts appeared at unpredictable intervals.

She knew that she should have died.

But she did not die because she still had her Papa Jacob.

Fate had given her a smile; had had her cast into the cell next to the one in which her foster father was confined. Only Jacob's burning determination to live had kept his daughter by choice also alive. He had listened with pain in his heart to her tale of terror.

And he had told her, "Dear Ruthalyn, of one thing am I greatly in doubt. And that is the fiend Roland's claim that you are Rick. I cannot and will not believe it."

He had heard her sobs of relief. "Oh, Papa Jacob, Papa Jacob, I-- I'm glad you said that. I. . .I just can't believe Rick is myself. He's so different. . .and I love him. I know more than ever I love him."

And Jacob did not have to see his daughter's face to know that anxiety was a tempest in her. "One thing bothers me terribly, Papa Jacob. I wonder about Rick now. Where is he? Does he yet live?"

"He still lives," Jacob said reassuringly. "He will rescue you, dear daughter. He still loves you. Have courage."

"Th- -thank you, Papa Jacob."

Of one thing they never spoke. And that was Roland's claim that Ruthalyn was his daughter. They did not want to believe it. So they mutually rejected it.

And the eternities ground painfully past. Darkness and dampness, unrelieved, sickening, stretching beyond Forever. Moldy food, stagnant water, and at night the gnawing of giant rats on some forlorn corpse.

One day, Jacob took ill. For an eon, Ruthalyn held her father's feverish hand through the bars. She sacrificed all her food and water to him. Her throat became some dry hellish fiend. And it was all to no avail. Jacob's fever grew and he lapsed into delirium. She screamed for help until she could no longer feel her throat.

Help would not come. There was only darkness.

She could only hold his hand and whimper, "Don't die. Oh, Papa Jacob, please don't die . . . " She felt like a little girl, very lost and lonely.

She fell into a tortured sleep.

When next she awakened, Papa Jacob was dead.

Nearly three months had passed since Rick's arrival at the Truthseeker garrison. Three months which merged into one single blur of concentrated effort. Effort which had borne fruit in the form of one hundred two-foot sticks of dynamite. One hundred guaran-

tors of an explosive victory.

And they had been three months of agony. Agony for Ruthalyn. Endlessly thoughts coursed through Rick's mind. **Is she safe? Is she happy? Will she understand when I tell her that I am Dion Roland and NOT herself in male form?**

An edge had been taken off Rick's pain by the Chief. The Chief--whose real name was Reuben Smith, but who was invariably called by his nickname--had become attached to Rick. He had often helped Rick out in the laboratory. And he regarded Rick with no little admiration because of his tremendous devotion to the Truthseekers.

So it was that one night, Rick and the Chief were having supper in the Chief's quarters. After eating for some moments in silence, the Chief said solemnly, "We launch our attack tomorrow, Rick."

Rick nearly choked on a mouthful of food. "Tomorrow? I hadn't heard..."

The Chief's brown eyes sparkled. "You worked so hard you practically lost touch with reality. Anyway, lad, our attack is to be sprung tomorrow. Tomorrow at midnight."

Rick swallowed his mouthful. "But--how will you get the men to the dam and the Palace?"

The Chief leaned back in his chair and sighed. "A detachment of one thousand men was sent to the Palace by boat three days ago They have instructions to remain below the horizon until nightfall then come in out of the sea to fight. We hope to catch them by surprise."

"Two-thirds of our total force!" breathed Rick. "Then--you sent the remaining five hundred men to the dam?"

The Chief nodded. "They're marching overland. Scheduled to reach the vicinity of Southern Lucifer tomorrow evening. They will rest and gather strength until around midnight. If you want to, you and I will deliver your dynamite to the two groups by helicopter. Fifty sticks for the dam; fifty for the Palace."

Rick pondered. "That means a hundred and fifty pounds of explosive for each structure. Both structures are very large considering the amount of explosive we have--the dynamite will have to be very carefully placed to be effective" He rubbed his chin and repeated. "Very carefully placed."

The Chief agreed gravely. "You can see that they are."

Rick grinned. "Very true. I wouldn't miss this for the world"

"Well, lad, any more questions about tomorrow?"

A thought had occurred to Rick which was very unpleasant. It concerned Ruthalyn. She might still be at the Palace of the Sorcerer Supreme. If she were inside when the dynamite went off...

He shuddered. He explained his feelings to the Chief. The Chief's countenance became serious. "She means very much to you lad?"

"More than I care to admit."

"But the Truthseekers **must** succeed."

"We **must**," confirmed Rick. "She would want it that way."

"Then you are willing to risk her life, lad?"

"Really, Chief, I have no choice."

The Chief sighed his characteristic sigh. "Lad--I'll be hoping for you and her. Mightily."

"Thanks, Chief," Rick murmured. He felt incredibly tense inside. It was as if a frozen rivulet of lead were coursing through his intestines. It was because he realized one thing all two well:

He could not risk Ruthalyn's life.

Not for the Truthseekers.

Not for the world.

Not for his own life.

And so he went to bed with his dilemma after leaving the Chief perhaps a bit too hastily For long hours he writhed around in his sleep, vainly trying to dismiss his problem...

When the solution came to him. It was a daring plan. A plan in which he might simultaneously rescue Ruthalyn and bring victory to the Truthseekers. But it was fearfully wild and risk-ridden. The Chief would never approve, so he must keep it to himself.

But tomorrow he would carry it out.

XI

The helicopter rotors filled the dark cabin with a keening roar as they drove over the nighted landscape. Their only companions in the sky were the magnificent stars and a dying sickle moon. Below, mile after mile of moon-bleached grass undulated over rolling hills in great waves to the horizon, small tree-copses throwing spots of shadow on that eerie luminiscence. And onwards droned the helicopter, carrying a precious load of one hundred sticks of dynamite, the dam near Southern Lucifer its first destination.

Rick was in the cabin, grasping the control stick. Through the cabin windows, the light of the waning moon cast a faint phosphorescence --just enough to illumine the Chief's features with a pearl mist. The two men said nothing. Both were thinking hard over the battle soon to come.

A match flared in the cabin. Revealed briefly in the harsh orange glow were the one hundred sticks of dynamite behind the control seats. The Chief lit a cigar and puffed on it. It was a sullen red coal in emptiness.

Rick concentrated on the nightscape beneath. In his mind he was still churning around his proposed plan. Indecision racked him...at times, the plan seemed too insane, too prone to failure...

And shame lashed him when he thought of Ruthalyn.

And as he thought of her, he felt a great yearning in his chest for her. With great force he realized just how much he had missed her. He analyzed the straining in him and he saw what it was. It was because of Doris. Doris had torn part of his soul away. Doris, who was now in all likelihood a lonely cloud of shattered atoms swirling across a bare dead plain.

He needed Ruthalyn to fill that void in him. He needed her desperately ,so desperately that he couldn't afford to lose her now or ever. He looked sidewise at the Chief's tense face. He liked the man and he regretted the fact he might have to use violence on him.

It was because his plan called for landing the helicopter on the roof of the Palace of the Sorcerer Supreme with the dynamite. Once there, he would rescue Ruthalyn, plant the dynamite, and flee. It was as simple and bold as that. In its very simplicity and boldness, it might stand a good chance of success...

But the Chief would never approve.

He would have to get the Chief out of the helicopter first. Rick's pulse rate stepped up a little as he contemplated what was to come. It seemed almost too good to be true--the fact that he, Rick, was Dion Roland and that Ruthalyn

could be his without shame...

"We're getting close," the Chief said around his cigar.

And they were. Far ahead, a wan white shining in the night, was the dam near Southern Lucifer. It occupied almost the precise space in which another dam rested in another continuum--the huge San Gabriel no. 1 in Los Angeles County. Closer they drew, skimming treetops...

Flashes of light and the thunder of guns filled the night. It was plain that the Truthseekers were attacking from the forest. The helicopter roared over them toward the 200 foot wall which was the dam..and the Chief gasped in dismay. "Rick, lad--look at that!"

Rick looked. His blood chilled in his veins. Fully a thousand men were strategically placed around the dam, powerfully armed and secure behind heavy log barricades. The attacking Truthseekers were outnumbered two to one.

The Chief groaned. "Hopeless! God-damned hopeless! Damn Roland! He had too much foresight. This place can hold off a small army."

His cigar was an orange tiny sun as he puffed in frustration Rick took in the dimly moonlit scene and hissed, "Not necessarily."

"Uh?"

"The Guard bully-boys down there think this 'copter is one of theirs. Watch."

His face stern, Rick brought the whirlybird down in a terrible swoop At a hundred miles an hour, it dipped into the clearing within the barricade and its landing gear plowed a swath of red shining death through the gathered Guards. Screams and curses and thunderous volleys followed it as it retreated into the night skies.

The Chief's face was drawn. "Lad ...that was pretty risky..."

"But we must have killed a hundred men."

"True," the Chief reluctantly agreed.

"Now..." and a savage light glistened in Rick's eyes. He handed the controls over to the Chief. "Circle the damned place."

The Chief complied. Rick fumbled in the darkness for the dynamite; removed five sticks from the pile. He tied them together and stuck in a blasting cap with a short fuse attached. "Fly over the barricade at two hundred feet," he commanded.

The Chief obeyed. A rain of slugs riddled the sky. Four shots shattered their windshield; isolated spangs told of bullets hitting the fuselage...

Rick lit the fuse. Taking careful aim, he dropped the dynamite.

Lazily downward the sputtering spot of light which was the fuse wheeled. Down, down, growing smaller..it vanished into the ebon mass of the barricade...

A sudden blinding concussion of light destroyed the night...came a great roar, rumbling across the skies, growling with lurid thunder at the smashed bodies of men and logs slowly and hideously erupting into the heavens..fell a great rain of dust and splintered wood and tortured earth.

Screams rasped in a hellish cacophony into the reborn night. Screams of maimed men, burned men, blasted men. Intermingled with shouts of triumph..like a wave, the Truthseekers stormed the sundered barricade, their guns barking.

Running across the dam came five hundred guards who had defended the barricade on the other

side Running toward the enemy with ready guns. . .for, despite the destruction they had witnessed, they were courageous men. Rick knew they were courageous- -so he detested what he had to do next.

Like some metallic bird of doom, the helicopter screamed down from the stars and roared across the dam. Roared- -like a scythe of God across a field of agony. Men splashed open into red horrors as that relentless landing gear plowed into them at a hundred and fifty miles an hour. . .others screamed and leaped the hundred feet down the dam wall to the flood-waters below.

What few escaped that annihilation fled yelling into the night. And already, the Truthseekers had taken prisoner the dazed survivors of the dynamite blast. They cheered as the helicopter landed

The Chief sprang out of the 'copter. "Where's your captain?" he roared to the gathering.

A red-faced giant bellowed, "Yes, Chief?"

"Clear out with your prisoners and your own men. Scram from this area. We're going to blast the dam!"

"At once!" Red-face hustled his men into a flurry of action.

By that time, Rick had counted off forty-five sticks of dynamite and was busy tying them tightly together. He jammed a long fuse with a nitro blasting cap into the bundle and leaped from the 'copter. He called through the confusion, "Over here, Chief!"

The Chief ran to his side. "Inside the dam," Rick bellowed above the din of swearing men.

Together they ran into the dam, along bright corridors, to the generator room. Once they were inside, the Chief hesitated and a great sorrow filled his whole frame. "Rick, lad," he said wearily, "I hate doing this. . .destroying so much labor, so much equipment - - it's disgusting."

"But necessary," Rick added solemnly. "I like it as little as you. But Empire must be staggered to give us another chance."

"True. . .well, get to it!"

The generators were roaring. Rick jammed his heavy explosive load under one of them and lit the fuse. Its sputter went unheard under the growl of the immense water-turbine dynamos below.

Rick and the Chief stood quietly for a moment- -then, of mutual accord, ran back along the straight corridors to the surface. The Truthseekers had already cleared the area and were fleeing through the woods. Rick and the Chief reached the 'copter, Rick springing in first.

He slammed both doors.

"Wh. . ." the Chief bellowed.

"Sorry, Chief," Rick cried as he started up the rotors. "I have plans of my own. You'd better run and run fast before the blast!"

"You. . ." the Chief thundered, and sprang for the 'copter.

"Run, Chief," Rick yelled, as the vehicle began lifting. "I assure you my loyalty lies wholly with the Truthseekers!"

Even as the helicopter whined up into the black skies, Rick saw a huge understanding fill the Chief's face. His brown eyes, now small with distance, lit up with compassion. He threw away his cigar and yelled after the departing Rick.

But all Rick heard was ". . .luck, Lad!"

Then he was streaking away and the Chief was running after his men.

Rick was two miles off when the blast came. He looked back and saw the entire face of the dam heave then crack and splinter outwards,

driven by the remorseless power of an infant sun. Huge concrete Juggernauts skewered insanely across the stars. . .on their heels a billowing concussion of dust. . .then over everything was the gushing thunder of outraged waters. . .foaming in a two-hundred foot high torrent through the shattered gap, roaring down the long river valley. . . a wild watery demon; a moon-misted wraith of awesome Power flattening trees, houses, meadows- -without sympathy, without mercy.

Determination hardening in him, Rick turned the straining 'copter due north, toward the Palace of the Sorcerer Supreme. . .

And Ruthalyn.

Dion Roland felt vastly relieved when the Truthseeker attack finally came. Long months of waiting had been a horrible strain- -never sure when an attack might come; never sure how powerful it would be.

So it was he sighed deeply with released tension when a whitefaced servant rushed into his chambers and gasped, "M-my Lord, the Truthseekers are attacking in force!"

A chill smile quirked Roland's lips. "From which direction? How many men? Give me a rough approximation."

"Th-the Captain of the Guard says they are coming in from the ocean. They- -they came in small boats and were already on the beach before a sentry patrol spotted them. Their numbers are estimated at eight hundred to one thousand."

Roland nodded solemnly. "I had been expecting something like this. How powerful is their artillery?"

"Mere rifles, my Lord. Maybe a few powder bombs. . .they have helicopters."

"How many?"

"The Roof Guards counted ten, Sire."

"What are they doing?"

"Circling the Palace."

"What are our land forces doing?"

"They are gathering into a defensive cordon around the Palace. It appears that the invaders intend to capture the hill one mile north. . ."

Roland strode over to the balcony and looked north. Sure enough, a few tiny blacks dots could be seen crawling through grassy clearings in the light of the sickly moon. Isolated flashes indicated gunfire. Roland stared in wonder for a few seconds.

To think that this was San Francisco somewhere. . .

He had time for no more nostalgic thoughts. There was a droning rush . . .flashes of light spat and whined from some roaring airborne mass . . .**spang! splat! zzzz!** The Truthseeker helicopter thundered by, guns blazing. A prodigious leap carried Roland into the safety of his chambers. He clutched his left arm; a slow spreading blot of blood stained his luxurious silken jacket, the red contrasting with the harsh blueness. A flesh wound. . .

The servant was goggling. "Oh. . . ohhh. . .oh, my Lord, you-you aren't hurt. . .?"

Roland glared at the man. "No," he growled. "Just grazed. God damn. . ."

He began pacing furiously. He at last spun on the white-faced servant and growled, "Man- -you go to the Captain of the Guard and tell him to put out helicopters with men in them- -men and guns. Also tell the Roof Guards to open fire on Truthseeker helicopters if they aren't doing so already. Our helicopters are to shoot down any of the Truthseekers they come across."

The servant nooded; gulped; nod-

ded. "Im-immediately, Liege of mine." He scuttled off like a scared crab.

Five minutes later the Palace helicopters kicked up a moaning roar and hurtled into the midnight heavens. Gunfire was a staccato crescendo; the hill to the north was alive with bright tiny explosions which indicated that the Truthseekers were firing on the Palace.

A Truthseeker helicopter suddenly became one roaring mass of flame. A bullet had found its fuel tank. Screaming like an agonized comet, it rammed at full speed into the Palace wall, fountaining flames for hundreds of feet, making the entire building shudder briefly... but inflicting no serious damage.

Crumpled, annihilated, the flaming hulk slid to the ground. Roland growled at the battle, then shook himself to clear the slight dizziness caused by his wound. He then hurried toward his special chambers close to the ground floor from where he could control his projection equipment.

A Truthseeker helicopter began dropping powder bombs--a valiant but futile move against the Palace's granitic might. Roland heard the short loud booms and broke into a trot.

He reached his special room, forged inside. He smiled with satisfaction when he saw the ineffectual blasts hadn't distrubed his delicate equipment. He seated himself by a one-way observation port and scanned the scene outside.

Floodlights set in the roof illumned the area for acres all around. Furtive figures darted in and out along the fringe of illumination--stray Truthseekers away from the main scenes of battle Shots from the Palace chased them--sometimes catching up. Palace helicopters wheeled in combat with those of the Truthseekers...above all the yowls of men and machines in combat.

Then -- instantaneously -- the floodlights went out! All the lights in the Palace flickered off. Roland sprang roaring to his feet--and truth came to him. The Truthseekers must have destroyed the dam in Southern Lucifer after all!

Ruthalyn Melville could stand it no longer.

The stench, the filth, the despair ...all were crushing down upon her with killing force. Especially because her Papa Jacob was dead. How long ago was it he had died...

She did not know. She could not know. Ages, eons, eternities...how could she tell? How could she tell when for her there was only an unending malignant darkness? When hard bread crusts and stale foul water appeared at utterly unpredictable intervals, mysteriously materializing from the complete gloom?

She could only sit and try to beat off the unseen rats gnawing away at Jacob through the bars. Beat and beat until her hands were bleeding numb things; until her wasted form could no longer meet her demands for energy; until she fell into delirium-haunted sleep...only to waken with a cry and shake off the huge evil rats licking, licking at her mutilated hands...

She wanted to die. But she couldn't dare to die. There was one supreme reason for her to hold onto Life. Rick. Dear, beloved Ricky keeping hope burning in she who lay like an aborted foetus in a decomposing womb of Madness.

There came a day when she could no longer eat. Slimy food and putrid stagnant water could be endured only so long...

From then on it was a timeless

realm of agony, where Pain sat like God upon a throne of swirling ebony glittering, draped with writhing red lightnings upon which danced his torture-fiends...

And she tried to drop into delirium while she waited for Death.

But the merciful respite of insanity was not granted her for long. The rats came. Hairy and greedy and fetid, oozing like slime from the black nothingness of her confines, gnawing, gnawing, unsatiably hungry...

She could take it no longer. Her courage was exhausted. She had tried as best she could...

In the darkness, she smashed her water-crock. Her raw hands had trouble picking up a long and deadly-sharp shard. They succeeded finally, and she brought it to her throat.

Forgive me, O Ricky...

The floor shuddered beneath her. As if from across an endless sea, dull **booms** reached her numbed senses. Uncomprehendingly she listened to them. What did they mean? What did they signify?

Her hand holding the shard fell. She made a supreme effort to get to her feet, but failed. She sprawled unconscious across the floor. But she did not topple into delirium. She toppled into hope

Pray Ovarron my hope is not false...

Dion Roland worked feverishly in the darkness. He prepared his storage batteries and gasoline engines, coupling them to two small but very powerful generators He did not like to think about what the quenched palace lights meant. Only high explosives or a vast force could have broken the barricades at Southern Lucifer...

It was all too suggestive that the man Rick still lived.

He finished his task; glanced outside. It was very hard to make out detail in the vaguely silver darkness. The crescent moon, instead of clarifying things, confused the scene. Nevertheless, flashes of gunfire riddled the night.

He reached in the darkness for a switch; snapped it. The gasoline generators roared into mighty life. His lips set in a humorless smile, he adjusted his projection-equipment controls. He flipped another switch...

And outside, madness.

Even Roland himself, in his special room, was chilled by his own creation. The men of the Truth-seekers had even less assurance than Roland that what they saw was illusion...and what they saw:

Over the Palace whirled a tall towering tornado, shot through and through with an infinity of Shapes, Forms, and Colors. Music like the trilling of a billion demons issued from that Thing; pulsating and wheeling with all the colors of evil...

Down from the infinite sky lashed a thunderbolt. Down--to explode into mind-reeling brilliance. Stood now beside the Palace: Ovarron, Body of impossible majesty standing like a three-thousand foot column of poured hellfires, his face inexpressably pained with the knowledge his children were at war. Atlas; Adonis; Hercules...he was all, his supreme Form molded from the bowels of the Sun and wreathed with the glory of Polychrome.

He lifted his thousand-foot arm, a gesture of peace, his eyes solemn pools of eternal darkness scrutinizing his children.

Frightened men huddled and whispered, feeling strangely insignificant; feeling like small children caught raiding the cooky jar. "T'-aint real," hysterical voices babbled. "Remember what th' Chief sed..."

"Blasted jungle of whirling photons..."

"Charge it--thin air can't hurt you, you bastards!"

A furtive shot sent that God-imposed hush crumbling...

Wrath! Rage beyond imagination ...a black scowl thunderlashed across Ovarron's burning-gold countenance. Those ebon-infinite eyes grew huge with flashing anger. That great lifted arm came down...

And with it came the Legions of Ovarron!

Blue vagueness, far-distance sparklings...

Sound-horror, slithering--shrieking and piping across the skies, prancing from the mountains, gliding on waves of foul horror from the ocean...

Blue specks...blending and shifting--extending in an impossible storm across the entire sky...drawing ever closer, riding on the waves of the music of terror, vomiting from some nether Inferno and spewing like hell-spawn across the ocean and the world.

They streamed past the men; demons and demonesses upon steeds gaunt and stark and flame-eyed--they taunted and shrilled and piped and jibbered, their eyes embers of blood-ruby brilliance, soaking a crimson essence of Evil across the plain and the forest...

And over everything, inside everything, the they-beings who wriggled and wriggled in their formless tiny black dimensions, ceaselessly and eternally like the larvae of fiends...

A screaming, tinged with insanity:

"Hooves thundering,

Manes flying,

And the hell-horses of Hillorn did sunder

The beautiful land of Horal-Aslunder"

A shout: **"Who the hell said that..."**

Whimperings, pipings, whinings and gibberings...everywhere and everywhen the they-beings, writhing in formless dark rage...

"WHO THE HELL SAID THAT?"

"C-commander, you better look over Renny here--he's cryin'..."

"Yahyahyah...Mommie, Mommie ...stop the bogies...**stop**, yaaaa"

"Can't see a damn thing...bop him. Knock him out, Jim! It's hell!"

"C-commander! COMMANDER--NO!"

Filling all the sky was an awesome Thunder; pouring in an infinite wave down from the stars came Satan-Stallions--indescribable steeds breathing flame and rage, pounding the tortured atmosphere with their massive burning hooves. They drew near the whimpering humans--were upon them, slashing past in obscene madness, ectoplasmic riders beslimed like squashed slugs, shrilling and spewing the ebon shapeless they-beings which were like rippling fog...

"Mommie--**mom...mie...YAH!** Oop...take me widdya! Pleez, blue devilies..."

"Grab him, Jim! Goddam...!"

Surging like an enraged Styx, those shapes out of delirium seethed past the men, mouthing their chilling gibberish...

And then they were gone. Men sobbed and laughed and cried in hysteria as the last of the horrors faded away up into the constellations. Faded--leaving only Ovarron who was God...

And He who was God did again raise that masterful mighty arm, turning eyes now compassionate on the insects which were men.

"O!" And it was like a gentle thunder; a low-pitched reassuring from

the deep chest of Father Forever.

"O, YOU WHO ARE MY SONS... LISTEN TO ME; I, WHO AM YOUR FATHER AND YOUR FATHER'S FATHER...I, WHO AM OVARRON, THE PROTECTOR OF SATANIA AND THE LORD OF ALL SPACE AND TIME!"

"Hell...th' bastard cracked Renny..."

"Fake! It's a filthy illusion--what the goddam are we? Cowards? Charge it! Charge, I say..."

"SHUT UP, Davis!"

"Aw, Commander..."

"To charge would be murder. Guards outnumber us, don't forget. We have to distract their attention because the guy Rick should be along with the Chief and an explosive soon."

"Listen--'copter?"

"MY CHILDREN, CANNOT YOU HEAR ME..."

"Damfake...yeah, a 'copter... whozit?"

"SURRENDER, MY CHILDREN! NAUGHTY HAVE YOU BEEN..." That impossibly handsome Face was etched deeply with sorrowing lines "...BUT I AM FORGIVING. I, YOUR PROTECTOR, OVARRON ASCENDANT!"

"'copter comin up th bay..."

"FOR, MY SONS, THOU MUST REMEMBER THAT IF THOU ART STILL IMBUED WITH THY RASH INSANITY, I, OVARRON, WILL BE FORCED TO SUMMON THAT WHICH IS BEYOND DESCRIPTION...

"THAT, WHICH CAN ONLY BE TERMED IT WHICH DEVOURS SPACE-TIME!"

"Damnfool thing--whatinhell did it say?"

"Dunno. Hey, Commander, Y'unnerstan?"

"Slightly--and I assure you I don't like it."

"Hey! It is the guy Rick!"

"Yeh--I'd know that 'copter ennywhere!"

"Fire away!" yelled the Commander. "Distract those bums in the Palace! Rick must get through!"

Guns barked and bucked and spat flame. Slugs whined toward the palace behind Ovarron. The burning beautiful column which was the God quivered ..the immense face grew sad; despairing eyes surveyed the men so tiny...

"MY CHILDREN, WHY HAVE YOU DRIVEN ME TO THIS?

"NOW I MUST SUMMON IT WHICH DEVOURS SPACE-TIME!"

And Ovarron vanished.

And Dion Roland profusely sweated as his hands flew over the projection - equipment controlboard, putting his masterpiece into place. The charge of the Legions of Ovarron hadn't frightened off the rebels--which meant that they were forewarned about the illusions.

Which meant that It Which Devours Space-Time **had** to succeed!

His fingers shaking, he turned it on...

Rick was five miles away when he saw what was going on.

From the whirlybird's high altitude, he could make out the brilliant figure which was Ovarron. He needed no more than a single glance to comprehend the state of affairs. Hard-pressed--or angry--Dion Roland had utilized his projection equipment, hoping that it would demoralize the forces of the Truthseekers.

An intelligent but wasted motion, thought Rick, as he came closer. **The soldiers have been well-briefed...**

But when the Legions of Ovarron charged, he felt uneasy. There was a very good chance that prolonged treatment with the illusions would

do the essentially simple soldiers no good. The things were so hideously real...

Rick nodded grimly to himself. Action had to be taken- -and fast! He patted the tightly-bundled fifty sticks of dynamite by his side. One hundred and fifty pounds of concentrated might, they were. They would end the strife. They would bring new freedom to Satania...

They would give him Ruthalyn.

And then he bristled with an abysmal terror.

A clawed hand- -a huge fiendishly clawed hand- -was slowly and steadily blotting out the stars. It was black with the fathomless darkness which dwells like some hungry frigid beast in the voids between the island universes. The huge hungry void which forever yowls its soundless and mindless torment...the ebon emptiness which strives and strives to fill itself...inexorably Earthwards swept that ravening Hand, consuming the myriad suns and still unsatiated.

A talon, purely ebony, flicked out. It brushed the crescent moon; Earth's sister screamed her torment as she cracked and splintered and was driven open by her inner energies...then her miserable fragments were swallowed by the Hand.

The Hand which now filled all the broad sky.

In its palm which was black with the darkness of Before Creation, there swirled and wafted nebulous unimaginable things...Scavengers to suck fading life, to consume the essence of the dynamic even as the Hand consumed the essence of the static...lazy and lilting and horrifying...

Vagaries of sound...unifying... falling like a rain of aural sensation gentle with the nebulae-things. Floating from the measureless black of the palm of the Hand in a lurid deadly cloud. It tinkled and shrieked and waned, leaving only the Things...

And the Things were melody. Iridescent in vermilion, coruscating with chartreuse, writhing in crimson whirlwinds shot through with saffron lightnings, they poured out Melody which was lustful...Melody of sight and smell and sound...flowing horrid into the mind, entrancing wide eyes with a facade eternally dynamic and spectrum-lovely. A facade which would flow and shift and melt into Wraiths who would suck and suck until life was gone. Suck and suck while their melody was some thick honeyed liquid which soothed...

Which soothed with words of death. **Destroyer is coming, coming, and you, small Manling, are with Destroyer going.**

For forever shall we shower, none lovelier...

For forever shall we with Destroyer rove.

Oooo, Oooo, are we not beautiful?

Oooo, Oooo, are we not beautiful?

Come, manling...changelings we, you can us-enjoy as we you-enjoy...

And change they did; shimmered and rippled; coalesced into Sirens of beauty unimaginable...hair which was raven gold burning auburn... figures of plump firmness langorously with vehemence trembling into a smoothness which allowed nothing but what why where when...

Rick's individuality struggled with that horrible **blending. But nothing- -but what- -but why am I allured so- -what before me: Siren? Valkyrie? Norse gods, thou I loved ...oh, ecstasy, music so liquid, smoothly sliding through my being like...Insanity!**

Insanity!

Dimly from afar: the sound of

rotors.

Rotors = helicopter = Unimportance.

The illusions had wholly claimed Rick, robbing him of his individuality, blinding him, hypnotizing him. He cried out...ah, Siren, come to me, come to me, dissipation of vagueness...lovely, lovely, hair of auburn gold flaming raven...

Oooo, Oooo, Manling, Manling... Oooo, so cute.

Oooo, Oooo, Manling, Manling... Oooo. so cute.

Manling, at us lovingly look: Oooo, are we not beautiful?

Manling, at us lovingly look: Oooo, are we not beautiful?

Oooo, you are beautiful...before and behind, Sirens so many, Sirens of raven hair burning in auburn gold glory, Sirens of figures to drive a soul mad...wafting like whorls of delicate gas, lilting lovely in the devouring black...

Oooo, Manling, Manling, join us sooon.

Oooo, Manling, Manling, join us sooon.

Sooon, when Destroyer All-Destroysss!

Heehee eeek kkk ccekkk...

Sharp shrill discord...the Sirens softly swirling were now changing; vibrating; becoming Hags of demon-forms which pranced and shrieked and leered like Loki Pan...

Rick cried aloud and the serene night was an explosion in his eyes He looked back, his entire form trembling in revulsion. All he saw was a landscape dimly lighted by a sinking moon. No--afar was a swirling nebulosity atop a large hill.

The hill upon which the Palace rested.

Then it had been only illusion. Rage burned like an acid in Rick. Illusions. Mere products of electromagnetic science. Yet so real as to be able to scare the soul out of a man. Roland was a true artist at the creation of illusions. He was dangerous. He might yet win.

Rick's teeth clenched in desperation. Despair surged in him as he realized that the Truthseekers, courageous as they were, could not stand much longer before those products of Roland's imagination. They were probably already in full retreat...

Time--he must not waste time... he must plant the dynamite and rescue his Ruthalyn while he still had a chance. **Dearest, Dearest, pray God I'm not too late.**

With a growl of complaining motors, the helicopter spun in a great angry arc under Rick's hand and drove once again toward the Palace. It drew closer to the area of revolting illusions; entered the nebulous fringe...

Grinding his teeth in an agony of concentration, Rick drove through the twisting tortured Forms. The Palace roof was his destination; his ideal; his sole reason for existence. It was ahead--below--coming up to meet him...

The helicopter's landing gear crumpled under the impact. Rick was slammed around the cabin. He lay on his back across the control seat for a few seconds, dazed and thankful. Spurring himself, he lifted his precious dynamite from behind the control seats and kicked open the 'copter's wrenched door. His eyes tightly shut, he sprinted the short distance to the door set into the wall surrounding the roof which led inside. He slammed it behind him, and breathed in heavy relief as the illusions were cut out, unable to follow him inside. He breathed with even heavier relief over the fact that the sole remaining blasting cap, stuffed in his shirt

pocket, hadn't exploded during the crash landing.

It took him some seconds to get his bearings. He frowned with the realization that the most difficult part of his plan was before him. Not only did he have to find Ruthalyn--he had to find another helicopter to carry them to safety. He set his jaw in determination and rushed down a flight of stairs.

In a hallway he came across a cowering palace servant He realized that the cringing man was a probable source of information and approached him. The servant glanced up; gasped, "My Lord..." then he stopped. "You aren't His Magical Majesty," he said wonderingly.

"You can be damned sure I'm not," growled Rick. The man's eyes widened as they fell across the dynamite. "What--is that?" he blurted, backing off warily.

Rick grabbed him by the collar and hoisted him off the floor with one arm. "This," he rumbled, "is no concern of yours. But to make up for this shortcoming in concern, occupy yourself with answering my questions. Where is the woman, Ruthalyn Melville?"

The man blanched at the unsubtle threat in Rick's voice. Hardly thinking, he burbled, "In...in the dungeons, Sire.'" The last word he added from force of habit.

"Lead me!" barked Rick.

"Then l-let me go."

"If you betray me, you die."

The man shivered nodded. "Th-this way, Sire." He started off at a trot and Rick followed.

Followed all the way down to the dungeons. Miraculously, those few individuals whom the running pair had passed had paid no attention. What with the Council in session and all the Guards outside the palace and a battle raging, who was interested in people obviously fellowservants?

The key-keeper looked up in mild surprise as the pair burst into his room. "Sire..." shrilled the servant --only to be silenced as Rick's giant hand caught him in the back of the neck with a murderous force. The key-keeper stared unbelievingly as the man crumpled. Then some great hard thing was heaving him out of his chair.

Holding him by his jacket-front, Rick said angrily, "You will do me a favor. You will release the woman, Ruthalyn Melville. And you will do it right away."

A simple glance at Rick's menacing features and fierce eyes convinced the key-keeper. His head bobbing like an old woman's, he led Rick along rows of dismal cells. He took out a torch from its holder and led Rick into a chasm of gloom. He halted in front of Ruthalyn's cell and opened it with considerable trouble because his hands were trembling so much...

Revealed in the wan torchlight was a thin and huddled shape, once-glorious golden hair tumbled pitifully askew. Rick stood for a few reeling seconds in unbonded horror and wrath. He spun on the key-keeper and felled him with a single blow. Then he dropped to Ruthalyn's side with a little unconscious moan.

He nearly shouted his exultation. She still lived! He picked her up, his great arms forming a cradle. And he felt like crying when he saw her. raw, mutilated hands...her thin face...

He kissed her forehead tenderly. She would live! She would live or the gods would pay and pay dearly!

He set her down and picked up the dynamite. He rammed the nitro blasting cap in it and stuck in a twenty-minute fuse. It was the long-

est he had. He rolled the lethal bundle into Ruthalyn's cell; came in with the torch--

And by chance he glanced into the adjoining cell. A cold wind blew through him. There lay Jacob. Dead Jacob, body half gnawed away by giant rats.

A vast wrath fountained through his viens. He touched the torch to the fuse and scooped his beloved into his arms. He ran madly up the corridor, striving to put as much distance between himself and the sputtering flame of doom as soon as possible.

He had no misconceptions about the power of his dynamite. One hundred and fifty pounds of high explosive is no joke. Especially when it is planted in the very foundation of a structure. The blast would tear apart all the dungeons and five or so levels above them. It would bring the entire Palace crumbling in upon itself. Simple granite blocks with loose mortar cannot stand by themselves.

Up and up. Tirelessly his great legs pumped, driving him and his precious burden toward the roof. Halfway there. Fifteen more levels to go. Three-quarters of the way...

Guards! Four of them, coming down the corridor. The instant they saw the running Rick, they knew something was wrong. They charged. An inarticulate roar rent itself from Rick's chest. Rapidly yet tenderly he deposited Ruthalyn to the floor. He sprang erect to face the oncoming four. And to the Guards' surprise, he charged them.

And no sooner was he among them than he was lashing right and left with sledgehammer force. Two Guards were smashed to the floor before they so much as realized what had happened. The other two jumped Rick...

And one of them met a merciless boot in his groin. He staggered away screaming; the other emitted a banshee wail of terror and fled. Like a tiger, Rick was after him; like a tiger, Rick roared as he sent the man crashing to the floor with a judo chop to the neck. Leaving the man twitching in the spasms of a severed spine, Rick returned to Ruthalyn and again scooped her into his arms. Haste was what was needed. Hurry, hurry. Run.

An eon of running.

And running.

His lungs became twin Infernos bursting his chest; his legs wobbled alarmingly. Then finally: respite, relief, the doors to Paradise. The doors to the roof. He ran for them...

Straight into restraining arms.

Arms which tore Ruthalyn from him.

Arms pummelling him remorselessly. He went berserk and sent men scattering--but not for long. He was strong--but he was no match for ten determined Guards. Brutal hands constrained him; his wrists were bound and strain as he might, he couldn't free himself. He was borne down stairs, through corridors, down ramps, through more corridors...

To a room. And inside was Dion Roland. Roland looked up smiling; saw Rick, and his smile broadened. "Well. We meet again."

Rick sullenly glared. A guard came in carrying the still-unconscious Ruthalyn and placed her on a couch nearby. "Shall we stay?" the guard-captain asked.

"Yes," confirmed Roland. He returned his focus to Rick and said suavely, "You were going to pay me a visit, I trust? It was kind of my men to escort you."

Rick held his silence. Within himself, a strange savage glee was

growing. Somewhere beneath the Palace, the dynamite was still sputtering irresistibly away. Fritting away the cruel seconds. He figured it would burn only five minutes longer.

Five minutes...

O, Life, you are still sweet...

"Rather silent aren't you, friend Rick? It's silent outside also. I suppose you saw my artistic masterpiece when you came in?"

"Psychotic masterpiece," hissed Rick.

Roland shrugged. "You have no appreciation for true art. See these controls? They are still working beautifully. They are creating outside a more profound interpretation of Hell than Dante Alighieri's classic."

Rick said nothing.

"Ah, well," sighed Roland. He glanced sideways at Ruthalyn; murmered, "It appears you came to rescue your girl friend from the big bad ogre. Knight in armor shining, full of dash and derring-do, eh?"

All Roland got was a frown.

He sighed again. But then all attention was distracted by a moan--it came from Ruthalyn. Roland's hazel glare scrutinized her now pitifully thin form without compassion. "Back to reality, my girl?"

It took her time to comprehend her surroundings. She read in Rick's blue eyes floods of sympathy and love. She showed she appreciated it by giving him a wan little smile.

Roland tipped back in his chair; licked his lips. His eyes shining with a grim humor, he said, "You are myself, Rick. You are the exact duplicate of me--only you're about twenty years younger. Correct?"

Reluctantly, Rick nodded. He saw Ruthalyn tremble as if from a sudden inner shock. Roland perceived the movement also, and his features became keen. "You heard that, Ruthalyn. Rick is me. He admits it. And you are..."

Her eyes were wide now, pleading. "No!" she screamed. "Don't say it, Dion! Please..." She staggered from the couch over to Rick's side. Before anybody could say anything, Rick barked, "Will you please cut my bonds?"

Roland shrugged. "I don't see why not. Release him, Captain."

It was done in short order. Tenderly, Rick caught his beloved in his numb arms. If he was going to die, he wanted to die holding her. It could not be much longer before the blast came...

Roland glanced at the trembling Ruthalyn. "Frightened, Ruthalyn, my little baby? Poppa Dion only wants to tell Ricky something."

She shook her head violently, golden hair streaming. "Oh, Rick," she sobbed. "Don't listen to him."

Roland said smoothly -- too smoothly, Rick thought--"I have an interesting fact for you. Rick, especially because you are the younger embodiment of myself. And I can wholly substantiate my fact with incontrovertible proof. Ruthalyn is my daug..."

He said no more. There was one soul-clawing instant when the room shook like a twig in a gale--then there was no more floor; only an Abyss endless and black wherein dwelt a bursting sun...wherein fell tons upon tons of cracked and sundered stone.

And Rick's last exultant thought was: **the dynamite!**

Then there was only a grinding buffeting blackness thundering beyond Forever.

XII

There was a stinging wetness in his face and some far forlorn howl.

Rick lay with his eyes closed for a very long time, listening to the sweeping ocean-wind sigh up the hills and through the grasses. His mind was swimming around in some detestable stupor. He sensed that his position was odd and tried to move. He could not move. And from where his legs should be there was only a vague crawling pain.

He at last opened his eyes. Blackness and wind-driven rain met him at first; painfully the darkness cleared a little. What wan illumination there was was coming from a moon hidden behind dark avalanches of cloud which glided with ebon hugeness across a sweeping sky. It showed dimly great jagged mounds of rock jutting in silent agony from a spreading mountain of rubble. Rock which wept with the tears from the sky.

Again Rick tried to move. Again he failed. Two tortured blocks of granite, dully glistening with the biting rain, wedged him between their shattered bulks.

A thin shadow stirred among the stark black masses; moaned and came over to Rick. Dazedly he wondered who it was. A soft delicate thing came out of the cloudy dusk to caress his forehead. Rick tried to stir...

A voice. "Ricky...are you awake, Ricky?"

"R..." His throat clogged. "R-ruthalyn?"

"It's me, Ricky. Are you all right?"

The awareness of that odd creeping pain where his legs should be chilled him. "I- -Ruthalyn, I d-don't know..."

"Ricky..." Her warm tones drove back the wind and the rain and the darkness. "You'll be all right, Ricky I love you."

Rick found that he could move his hands. Gently he caught hers; pressed them to his cheek. "M-my darling...I'm glad."

"I'm glad too, Ricky. But..." Sobs caught in her throat. "Why must there be war? War and tyranny? Why must such horrible symbolizations of the infant in Man be? The infant which is selfish and cruel and fearfully destructive..."

The wind wailed through the rubble. The rain spattered down in cold blinding sheets. "Yes, destructive," came Rick's quiet reply. "War is of necessity cruel...but in this case, war was necessity."

"I- -know, Ricky, I hope it never happens again. So senseless- -stupid...it isn't fair. It isn't fair to me, to my children if I ever have any. It isn't fair to Humanity that they who hold power should cause war."

"It never was fair. It never will be. Darling, let us hope it's all over now. You and I and the Truthseekers- -let us forge an Eden."

"Eden...?"

"It was a Garden in a book called the Bible. It was peace and love and the glory of the brotherhood of Man."

"Yes, an Eden," she murmured. "We shall forge it, Ricky. Tell me so."

"We shall."

"Thank you. I'll always love you, Ricky."

There was a scrabbling in the debris which could be heard above the wind and the rain. Came a tall tattered swaying figure, silhouetted against a moonlit rift in the wild clouds. A huge figure with massive shoulders. It was Dion Roland . . .

Ruthalyn pressed close to Rick, and he sensed her thin form shudder against his. It filled him with an insane wrath for Roland . . . a wrath which quickly died.

Which died because the moon suddenly shone through a chasm in the

storm and fell across the sundered Palace. And it showed Dion Roland as some crushed and maimed horror walking like a corpse given life. His whole left side had been caved in, his left arm mangled beyond recognition. Only his legs seemed to be any good, and they carried him toward the two lovers.

Blood was gushing in a steady stream from his mouth, was dripping from the glistening mess of his left arm Despite it, he laughed -- a frightful gurgling laugh. White-faced, Rick and Ruthalyn stared at him, wondering how he could still live.

"Shi ... ish ... loversh, eh?" Again that insane laugh. "Ricksh, my lad, g-g ... you wash successful. Damn dynamite -- wash hoping you'd not make it ..

"Power ... g-g-ak ... Power. You stole my power. Bad, bad -- you wash a naughty boy, Ricsh ... you hurt Poppa Dion. . ."

He stood teetering, hideously chuckling at some inner thought. "Vice. A vicesh ... a habit ... heh ... aak ... you cured me of it, Ricksh lad. But I mustsh cure you in reshturn ... g-gkk ... Lad, hear me out ... Ruthalyn is my daug ... daughter. Huk-k-k heh ... yes, my daughter. I can provesh it, lad ..."

Ruthalyn moaned. "Don't Dion, please ..."

"kk-g-k ... yesh, Ricksh, she's my daughter. S-sylvia ... aksh Sylvia of Medea ... shesh'll tell you ... careful, lad, you don't want to marrysh your own ... aaak-k-k ... daughter?"

"This ..." Rick asked, horrified, "... is true?"

"Y ... k-k-k ... yesh. L-lad, for once trust me ... itsh true ..."

As Rick let the full awful realization burn through his being, Roland swayed and muttered, "k-k ... Ricksh, lad, I ... g-kk ... should hate youish to hell ... gaak ... but Ish cant ... damnedif Iknow ... aaa-k-g-k ... why. Maybesh itsh because I ... k-aag ... admiresh you somewhy ... damnifI ... knowwhy ... damndeath ..."

With a final gurgling moan, he toppled. And the rain mercilessly hammered at his still dead form.

The abyss in the clouds closed, cutting off the revolting-pathetic sight. But a new sound filled the uneven darkness -- a woman's sobbing. It was Ruthalyn. "Ricky!" she cried desperately, "I- -loved you. O, Ricky, tell me I'm not your daughter .."

"I ..." But Rick found himself speechless.

"For nothing," she sobbed, "Patience and hope -- gone to the winds. Ev-ever since Dion said I was his daughter, I -- I had been hoping to get back to you, because you were not myself born a male."

But Rick could find nothing to say. And Ruthalyn suddenly tore herself from his side and limped off into the dark and the storm. Rick could only groan and feel a terrible loss swell through him ... swell so powerfully and agonizingly that it shoved him once again into the Limbo of unconsciousness.

There was a time of delirium when he drifted through an Inferno of Shapes wrenching in agony. Then an eon of some red infinite madness through which Pain whirled in his torturing glee. And afterward only a burning bitter whiteness rose and rose to lose itself in some Cosmos of the unknown.

And there was a time of detachment when he had no body. Vague rough motions floated up to him from some shoreless black sea, suggestive of a forward pace.

And finally there came a time of

clarity when all was blindness but the mind functioned with superhuman precision. And it was then that he fastened upon the Problem ...

Problem: I have love. She whom I love is supposed to be my daughter. Because of ingrained social standards stemming from primitive and sometimes illogical abhorrence of incest-interbreeding, I cannot have her -- yet I am but three years older than she.

Solution: Disregard the covenants of my society?

An act of futility.

Solution: Exists there any?

Only determination can show.

Facts must be reviewed. From facts stem logic (also conversely); from logic comes answers (also conversely).

Fact One: Ruthalyn is the daughter of Dion Roland.

Fact Two: Dion Roland is myself.

QUESTION!

Fact Two: Query: Is Roland truly myself?

I have a hunch (feeling? sense? an infantile escape from reality?) that Roland is not myself. Straw-grasping? I must review ...

My name is Dion Roland. His name is Dion Roland.

I remember Doris. He remembers Doris.

He has a crescent-mole on the back of his left palm. As do I. As does Ruthalyn.

His build is mine. His voice is mine.

His hair is blonde. My hair is blonde.

His eyes ...

QUERY! Roland-eyes. HAZEL. Rick-eyes: BLUE.

QUERY! What significance lies in this?

Fact Three: Roland came from an alternate continuum. As did I.

QUERY! Were these continuums the same?

SOLUTION! Impossible! The Roland continuum could not have been the same as the Rick-Roland continuum. Retinal differences = genetic differences = continuumal differences. (Equation: first part.)

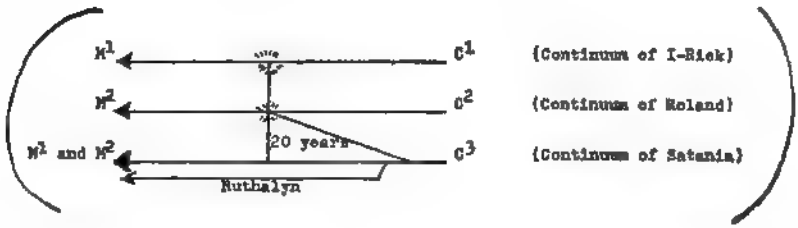
Retinal differences = R

Genetic differences = G

Continuumal differences = C

R + G + C = Equation: second part. The answer to my problem. (And now I can be happy. Ruthalyn is not my daughter. The love I have can blossom; flower and bear fruit and mature with the years of emotion in Eden.)

Equation complete:



So very simple and clear ... I, Rick, was precipitated through the continuums by an exploding Moon shuttle. My continuum was C^1; I was Man #1 -- M^1. My body, M^1, hurtled through C^2, which was the continuum of Dion Roland - - - who was Man #2 - - M^2. Both M^1 and M^2 were flung into C^3 by M^1's initial continuum-hurdling momentum. Thus. M^1 and M^2 arrive in C^3 - - only, due to an unevenness in the collision of M^1 with M^2, M^2 was thrown twenty years into C^3 's past. M^2 fathered the girl, Ruthalyn, and worked his way up through successive levels of power until he became the Sorcerer Supreme of Satania. **M^2, who, similar as his exterior features were to M^1, was a totally different individual!**

The span of the alternate universes is infinite. Thus: the genetic differences between a man of **hazel** eyes in one continuum and a man of **azure** eyes in another continuum, similar as their names, manners, clothing, and exterior features -- and memories -- might be, were greater even than the genetic differences between a man and his cousin's son.

Added to that the factor of Sylvia.

Oh Lord, thee I thank. Ruthalyn, Ruthalyn you are mine. You will be mine forever and always, beloved.

The abhorrence of incest stems from two main causes and numerous related causes. But the two main causes are: first, a primitive jealousy over the fact that one should get his/her mate so easily, and second, a natural horror induced by the sometimes unfortunate results of the combination of bad traits caused by excessive inbreeding. The side-causes are innumerable ... parent-worship; parents must be inviolate - - disgust at a potential symbol of narcissism; sibling seeing himself/herself in sibling.

But none of these factors apply to me. I have solved the relationship between the components of the trinity questionable. Only Dion Roland had any genetic relationship to Ruthalyn. Thus are the covenants of my culture satisfied. Thus will the inner **me**, molded by its own particular society, be placated. And now I can forget the bewildering confusion of alternate universes and concentrate on she whom I adore ...

And so Rick slipped into the untortured calm of natural sleep. His mind needed slumber to wash away the fatigue of its long ordeal at highest gear. He slept for a long time, the toxins of such illness-induced clarity of thought washing wholly away ...

When he awoke, he saw that he was in a room. A pleasant clean room with walls of white. Also he noticed that he was in a bed. He glanced down at his legs and saw that they were firmly encased in two great casts. And there drifted past his nostrils a familiar odor of medicines and antiseptics ...

A hospital. Odor is universal.

Then he perceived that he had company. There was Ruthalyn with a man broad of shoulders and white-haired; a sensitive face with very keen brown eyes. The Chief's calm voice filled the room. "Hello, lad."

Rick choked. "Hello Chief. You too, Ruthalyn."

The Chief looked at him gravely. "You've been unconscious a long time, lad. You've been out a month."

Rick gasped. "A -- a **month?**"

The Chief nodded. "Also, you can thank Dion Roland for the fact that both you and Ruthalyn are still alive today."

Perplexity suffused Rick. "H-how do you mean? I thought he died."

"He died all right, lad. But a past

effort of his saved you. This building is the Alchemic Hospital ... the most modern hospital in the whole world. Roland equipped it as best he could with whatever medical instruments he could recall from his other life. He was able to provide just enough equipment to enable you to survive. Intravenous feeding and penicillin -- without them, you'd have died."

Rick nodded slowly. "I -- see. And Ruthalyn?"

"Just about the same. She was slightly better off than you, even though she was three-fourths starved. Penicillin combined with intravenous feeding plus liquid foods later on have helped her completely recover during the past month."

Rick pondered. "It-- puzzles me, Chief, the fact that Ruthalyn and I should be alive at all. We were trapped in a five-hundred foot building when a dynamite charge went off in the foundations. Queer ..."

The Chief shrugged. "Shouldn't question such a miracle, lad. Really, though, circumstances were with you more than luck. Roland's room, as I remember, was on the ground floor right next to the outer wall. When the blast went off, it blew all rooms around the ground level of the structure outward while it brought the main mass of the Palace straight down. You and Roland and Ruthalyn were blown clear from under the bulk of the collapsing building. It appears a boulder rolled over Roland. You were hurt also; only Ruthalyn escaped unscathed "Maybe --" and the Chief sighed. "... it was because she was in your arms. What can defeat the power of love?"

Rick smiled faintly. "Probably nothing ... but tell me, Chief, what's been happening this past month?"

The Chief sighed. "Much. Right after the Palace was destroyed, my men found that the Guards were so numbed by the disaster that they put up no resistance at all. And when they realized that all their masters were dead, they also knew they had no source of income. Almost to the last man they joined our ranks.

"And once we were able to get the telegraph lines operating, the Guards all across Satania understood the same thing. Men must live -- so they joined our ranks at our promise of maintaining their income."

Rick whistled. "This is more than I'd hoped for. Have you established the nucleus of a new government yet?"

The Chief grinned. "Not quite. All we've done is keep the nation a unit. We were waiting for you to wake up"

"For me? Why?"

"Remember when you told me that you and Dion Roland were one and the same person? Well ... in view of your superior knowledge and ability, the leaders of the Truthseekers unanimously -- ah -- nominated you as their Leader. We know we can make no better choice."

A lump appeared in Rick's throat. "Th -- thank you. It is a great honor. And I do not know if I deserve it. I shall do my utmost to live up to your hopes."

The Chief swallowed. "Lad ... damned if I can say anything. Shake?"

They shook.

And then the Chief left with a promise to return. Rick gazed lovingly at Ruthalyn. She had been well taken care of; her wasted form had filled out; was firm and strong and healthy again. She had never been so beautiful, he thought.

"Darling ... how are you?"

She hung her head. "W-well enough, I think."

"And Hulda? Have you seen her?"

"Y- -yes. Jacob's death was a shock, b-but she'll get over it."

"I'm sure she will, beloved."

Her eyes met his, and he saw anguish in their azure deeps. Anguish and a tormenting despair. "Rick," she nearly cried, "You should know better. Please don't make it harder. I'm -- I'm your daughter ..."

To her amazement, Rick threw back his handsome head and laughed; roared until the walls trembled. "My poor brave beloved," he finally gasped. "Laboring under such a mental burden ... oh, darling, forgive me; come close and listen to me and be happy."

She came into his arms and listened, and ten minutes later her entire young form was alive with rekindled joy. Her eyes sparkled with her love, and she could never, never give him enough kisses. "Oh, Ricky .. Ricky ... my Ricky!"

He whispered into her ear, breathing deeply of the fragrance of her hair, "Just imagine, dearest -- Eden lies ahead of us. An Eden which we can help forge."

"An Eden to last for Eternity," she added fervently.

Then they were conscious only of each other.

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF OTHER WORLDS, Science Stories published Bi-Monthly at Evanston, Illinois for October 1, 1956

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are

Publisher, PALMER PUBLICATIONS, INC., 806 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois.

Editor, Raymond A. Palmer, Amherst, Wisc.

Managing editor, Beatrice Mahaffey, P. O. Box 56, Sta. V, Cincinnati 10, Ohio.

Business manager, Raymond A. Palmer, Amherst, Wisc.

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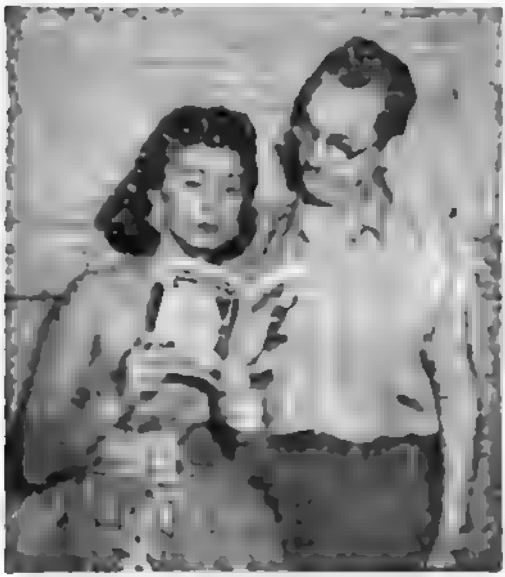
RAYMOND A. PALMER,
Signature of editor, business manager

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of October, 1956
CHESTER V. LEPAK
(My commission expires January 20, 1957)

SCIENTIFILM SEARCHLIGHT

Recommended Science Fiction Movies

By Forrest J. Ackerman



OTHER WORLDS' sci-fi film reporter with out-of-this world cinema-lovely MARLA ENGLISH, currently to be seen in The She-Creature. Marla was West Coast's choice for "Miss Science Fiction" in 1952; Forry Ackerman has for many years been known as Mr. Science Fiction.

Photo by Bill Cary

Statement of Policy: In introducing this department I wish to make my criteria clear to contemporary critics and to posterity (if any).

I am an inveterate filmgoer. My video lies fallow while I frequent the showplaces with the 21 yard screens. I once saw 356 feature length films in one year, and then my record of one a day was spoiled because I was sick a week.

But I am not an indiscriminate film fan. I do not deliberately expose myself to the Ma & Pa Kettle series, Tim Hovey comedies, nor cowboy and Indian epics like "WARpath and PEACEpipe." And yet I recognize a large segment of the picturegoing populace takes pleasure in such fare.

OTHER WORLDS' audience is a special audience. Palmerians may

Scene from "The Creeping Unknown" Starring Brian Donlevy and Margia Dean.

be expected to like pictures that would not necessarily find the same favor with Galaxians, Playboys or Ladies' Home Companions.

In other words, when I rate a picture good, I mean good for you. It might be bad for me, Robert Bloch, or Artie Shaw and his brother George Bernard; but if I think Rap (your Editor) would like it, I expect you would too, and that means a pic with plenty of action, adventure, mystery, suspense, glamour, science and sex appeal - - - in other words, pix like you'd expect to find filmed from the pages of OW. F'ja

• • •

THE SHE-CREATURE: (Marsh)- Marla English, the cheesecake I would like to have melt in my mouth, is alluring in this age-regression melodrama involving Chester Morris as a sinister Svengali. Sci-fi artist Paul Blaisdell plays the role of Marla's alter-ego out of the prehistoric past, out-thinking the creature from the black lagoon. Earplugs recommended for this picture if screams (your own) scare you. American International produced. GOOD

IT CONQUERED THE WORLD (well almost)- -rating VERY GOOD. Blaisdell gets blazed at the end of this one, but not before he's generated thrills and excitement as the menacing Venusian here to take over Earth with the aid of a duped collaborator, a scientist who pays

with his life for his mistake in abetting the alien invader. Musical score adds much to visual enjoyment. American International.

THE SEARCH FOR BRIDEY MURPHY (good). Could anything I'd say keep an **Other Worlds'** reader away? A documentary type treatment of a topic that has engrossed millions for years - - and grossed millions, I hear, as a best-selling book. The nite I saw the 100 minute preview, you could have heard a pun drop: nobody talked back to the screen, in fact there was scattered applause at the end. Paramount produced, Louis Hayward and Teresa Wright costar.

INVASION USA (Fair). Re-released for the new sci-fi fans who missed it originally. First film I've ever seen made up almost exclusively of stockshots, and (oddly enough) for that very reason the elusive feeling of reality is missing. Blowing up cities by simply superimposing familiar newsreel atom-blasts on them is imposing on the viewers' sense of wonder. Of special interest: the taxi driver is played by **Wyott Ordung,** who in the meantime has become a producer and written a scientifilm script, HELL IN THE HEAVENS.

THE GAMMA PEOPLE (Good). My, Gamma, what big eyes you have! "The better to hypnotize you with, my dear." In the mythical Balkan country of Gudavia, a mad scientist terrorizes the populace with his ray gun, whose virulent vibrations turn peaceful people into ravening, mindless monsters. Paul Douglas and Eva Bartok combat the menace in this Austrian film released by Columbia.

THE CREEPING UNKNOWN (Excellent). This is one of the best scientifilms I have ever seen, or you will ever see, or anyone is likely to. Based on the highly successful British teleplay, **The Quatermass Experiment,** this United Artists release starring Brian Donlevy is a grippingly graphic depiction of man-into-monster via exposure to mysterious forces in upper space. Nothing corny here but the title; the kernels are pure gold. Good news: a sequel's on the way.

Celluloid Snips: FORBIDDEN PLANET - - tops. Superscience gimmicks galore, augmented by electronic spine-tickling tonality score by The Barrons; beauty dept. by Anne Francis; brains, Walter Pidgeon; beast, Disney animators MGM spectacle in technicolor and cinemascope . . . EARTH vs THE FLYING SAUCERS: Good. Ray Harryhausen has a heyday wrecking the Capitol and otherwise raising hail Columbia in the District of same with discuships from saucerful space . . . THE BLACK SHEEP: Good. Bela Lugosi's last screen appearance. Chronicle of a black sheep (Basil Rathbone) of 19th century science whose cerebral experiments result in a bloodcurdling collection of human monstrosities. Bel-Air . . . 1,000 YEARS FROM NOW: Good. The barbarian world of the 10th century BC (Blast Catastrophe) where men are men - - unless they're Mutates - - and women are wild. RKO . . . THE WEREWOLF: Fair, Jet-propelled lycanthropy. Columbia . . . GODZILLA: Great. Of Japanese origin. Greatest monster since KING KONG . . . "1984": See it now - - work to avoid living it 27 years from now . . . **Watch for:** THE MOLE PEOPLE, BEAST OF THE AMAZON, CREATURE FROM HELL, NOT OF THIS EARTH, THE UNDEAD, THE DEADLY MANTIS, THE SHRINKING MAN and SPAWN OF HELL.

MAGICIAN - SECOND CLASS

By Hal Annas

Before Sasko reached the entrance beneath the sign "Mysto, The Magician," he looked in a window. His reflection was both strange and familiar. He knew he was five feet eleven inches tall, slim, had black hair, eyes, and a dark complexion. He was dressed in a dark suit, neat black bow tie about the collar of a gleaming white shirt, and he gathered, from the glances of others, particularly of the opposite sex, not revolting to look at. He certainly looked like an Earthman ...

At the entrance he paused.

"Beat it, Bub," the man said. "Only actors and actresses allowed in here."

"But I want to see the magician," Sasko said. "I need a job. I materialized some money earlier, but the people I offered it to said it was counterfeit."

"Two blocks up, turn left to go to the nuthouse," the man said. "Now, beat it."

A girl appeared behind the man. Here eyes were soft blue. "If you're an actor out of work come on in. I'm Mysto's assistant. Maybe he can get you booking."

Sasko walked by the man. His black eyes studied the girl, particularly her legs. They were better than anything he'd ever been able to materialize.

"I need a job," he said.

She gave him a quick smile that did things to his heart and made him feel he'd grown an inch. "Maybe you'll get one," she said.

In a small dressing room he was introduced to the magician. Mysto was a trifle fat and slouchy. His shirtfront held the stains of an amber liquid he was drinking out of a glass and his dark clothes were wrinkled as if they'd been slept in. On his dressing table was an ashtray that'd overflowed. He appeared worried.

"Actor out of work," the girl told him. "I remembered your asking about a broken-down actor at the agency."

"I need an assistant to hand me snakes," Mysto said. "She's afraid of them, and my last male assistant got bitten."

"Snakes?"

"He swallows them," the girl explained. "He read something about goldfish swallowing years ago. It was widely publicized. He hoped swallowing snakes would put him in the bigtime."

Sasko nodded.

"And I also want you to catch a bullet in your teeth," Mysto explained, handing him a small piece of lead. "Carry it in your mouth. When I fire the pistol work it out between your teeth."

It didn't sound difficult, but Sasko was apprehensive. When he performed magic unexpected things happened.

The girl stepped behind a screen to dress. He followed, wanting a closer look at her legs and figure, but she pushed him back.

Someone knocked on the door, yelled, "Two minutes, Mysto."

The magician studied Sasko. "Clothes all right," he said. "A little grease paint and you're all set." He took another drink from

the glass and walked to the door.

Sasko glanced in the mirror, down at the paint. He concentrated on the shading and watched his cheeks take on a pinkish glow. The paint itself was prop enough. All he needed was to implant the thought firmly that his make-up would be nearly like Mysto's.

The girl came from behind the screen. The dress she'd worn no longer hid her charms. The pants were not a waste of material, neither the bra. It occurred to him that maybe there was a scarcity on this planet. But he made no complaint.

Her cheeks were bright; her eyes alive with interest, and her smile for him very warm.

They followed Mysto out to the wing. On the stage a troupe of dancers was taking a bow. Half of them came trotting this way, while the other half departed in the opposite direction. The moment they got into the wing the bright smiles on their features vanished.

"Tough audience," one girl snorted. "Sitting on their hands."

A man appeared on the stage, announced, "And now, Mysto the Magician."

Mysto walked out, bowed. The girl moved gracefully at his side, took up a position beyond and behind him. She continued moving about. The audience clapped lightly, and then as it settled down, Mysto plucked a rose out of the air, wrapped it in a handkerchief and turned it into a sphere which floated up and out over the audience.

Sasko was a little astonished that Mysto would sink to the level of using props. The rose, he knew, had been made of rubber and blew itself up into that shape when he pressed something to form gas inside it, and, of course, kept on expanding until it became a balloon.

Mysto, it dawned, wasn't any more accomplished than he.

A stagehand rolled out a table draped with various paraphernalia on its top. Mysto used props for every trick. He even had false legs in the box when he sawed the girl in two, which, Sasko thought, was a shame, because her own legs were so much prettier and would've sawed nicely.

Somebody handed Sasko a box and nudged him. "Your cue," the man said.

Sasko walked onto the stage, aware of the movement inside the box. He lifted the lid gingerly and peeked. They were vicious looking and he got the idea they would like a nip at him.

Mysto pulled up his sleeves, showed his hands front and back. The girl danced about. The spot became dim, finally dark blue. Mysto tilted his head back and placed his hands against his stomach.

Sasko stood unmoving. Mysto grunted, rolled his eyes toward him and back. "Now," he breathed hoarsely.

Still Sasko didn't move.

Dancing near, the girl whispered, "The snakes. Lift them out one at a time and hold them near that opening in his shirt."

Sasko obliged. The first snake wiggled and twisted. Mysto opened his mouth as he looked at the audience, then closed it as he tilted his head back.

The snake tried to get into the hole in his shirt, but Sasko, remembering that he'd said he was going to swallow the snakes restrained it. "Open up," he said, holding the snake above Mysto's mouth.

Mysto cringed back, snarled, "Fool! Let it go in the hole."

The girl danced close again. "It's trained," she whispered. "It knows where to go."

Sasko didn't like it. Cheating, he knew, was frowned on. But he finally let the snake slide through his hand. It disappeared into the hole. Instantly Mysto straightened up, hiccupped, rubbed his paunch, let the audience see that it was wiggling. Applause sounded.

"Now," Mysto snapped, again tilting his head back.

Sasko brought out a larger snake, let it slide into the hole. This was repeated again and then Mysto strode about with his stomach jumping while the audience roared.

The girl touched Sasko's arm, danced off the stage. He followed and last came Mysto.

"If they call for an encore," the girl hastened to explain, "he does the bullet trick. Put it in your mouth so you'll be ready."

Mysto went back on the stage, held up a hand to the audience, then beckoned toward the wing.

"That's us," Bonnie said.

Again they went out. Mysto produced a formidable-looking revolver and aimed at Sasko. He got the idea and quickly moved the piece of lead with his tongue and held it between his teeth as the gun went off. The spot was very bright and it gleamed there.

Back in the dressing room, he was unaccountably sad. "You would've sawed nicely," he told Bonnie. "And when he said he was going to swallow snakes he should've swallowed them."

The girl stared, a frown on her even features. Mysto seemed puzzled, finally said, "You've a lot to learn. We'll begin teaching you at once."

It disturbed him, but he accepted the routine, learned sleight of hand that was not magic at all. Mysto wasn't satisfied with his performance and continued criticizing, as they went from town to town for one and two night stands, but gave him enough money to live on and to take Bonnie out occasionally.

When they played her home town she was in a fever of excitement. She took him and Mysto to her parents' home before the show and herself helped with the cooking. Her baby sister sat on his lap and asked him to tell a story. He told about Finuello in the next galaxy who changed all the inhabitants of a planet to minor magicians so he could loaf. She said it was almost as good as the stories in her fairy books but not quite as believeable.

She said, "If you won't tell anybody I'll show you something."

He promised and she closed her eyes tight and stood at the window. Then she intoned, "Starlight, star bright, I wish I may I wish I might ..."

The words were vaguely familiar. Something like them was known to the Magi. He decided to help her, and when she made her wish a tiny winged creature materialized, kissed her on each cheek, and made a subsonic suggestion to her subconscious that she would have a wonderful dream.

Enraptured, she ran back to him and told him she already knew what the dream was and that it would come true. He was to become her big brother. After the show they went on to another town.

Mysto grew fatter and drank more of the amber liquid. His performance fell off after a woman came to see him backstage and talked about money. He admitted she was his wife and that he was behind in

the payments for separate maintenance. He sold part of Bonnie's wardrobe and some of the props from his act.

Sasko became more disturbed as the enthusiasm of the audience fell off. He didn't like the use of props. They made him feel inferior. An accomplished Magi, he knew, would be turned into a goat by another one if he resorted to any form of trickery. His own weakness had appeared when he was young and he'd been fortunate enough to have a kind teacher. He'd remained in the first grade sixteen years, by reckoning on this planet, and even then hadn't made a passing mark by materializing twelve ogres and turning them into angels. Even beginners could accomplish the feat, but the best he'd been able to do was materialize something resembling his classmates. They were all young and innocent and, of course, not ogres. They merely acted like ogres when they made fun of his backwardness.

Mysto got sick and got arrested for making a speech, while sick, on the street corner. For being sick and taking too much of the amber liquid as a remedy, the officers kept him overnight in a sort of cage.

Bonnie was frantic. Without Mysto, the show couldn't go on and they wouldn't get paid and everything they owned would be held for their obligations. This in addition to the humiliation of failure.

"Maybe you could do the show," she suggested. "I'll wear a very brief costume and attract attention to myself whenever you make a mistake."

At curtain time they were waiting nervously in the wing. The preceding act, acrobats, was good which automatically put a demand on them to top it or suffer the coldness of the audience.

On the stage he plucked the rose out of the air. Concentrating on the proper passes and words, he forgot to press the button on the piece of rubber and it didn't inflate. The audience booed. They booed again when it didn't turn into a sphere and float away. They became apprehensive when it became first a salamander and then a baby alligator, but they clapped. They clapped until the alligator got out in the audience. There was a near riot. But at this point, as always, something unexpected happened. A shark swam down from the rafters and hit the alligator in the throat, then both vanished.

The orchestra played loud until the audience quieted.

He materialized some counterfeit money, warned the audience they couldn't spend it and flung it out to them. They booed.

Bonnie did an upstage jaunt to hold their attention and managed to hold his also. He forgot about the show and concentrated on her. Her brief garments weren't just the right shade of purple and so he made the proper passes to make them darker. And again something unexpected happened.

Wings sprouted from her shoulders and she flew out over the audience. The unhappy part was that she was pursued by a winged monster which, breathing fire, set someone's program aflame.

He made the passes to stop the whole thing, but, while the monster vanished, Bonnie fell in a man's lap and his wife happened to be there. Also she was nude, as the wings had taken their substance from her garments. There were moments of confusion before the clothes got back in their proper

places.

Flushed and excited, Bonnie hurried back to the stage as someone wheeled out the box in which she was to be sawed in two.

Instead of letting Bonnie get inside the box he placed her atop it. And to keep her from being frightened he cast a spell of sleep on her mind.

She sawed nicely, just as he'd known she would, but when the blood began running people out in the audience began to faint.

"It's just magic," he told them reassuringly. "Nothing to get excited about."

The stage hands weren't so sure. There were hissings and calls from the wing. And the manager walked on stage and grabbed the saw before he was finished. But as always something unexpected happened. The saw snatched away from the manager, threatened to saw him in two, then went on with its job. And then Bonnie lay there in two parts.

It didn't look just right and he got a little nervous, but went on with the act. There was no one to catch the bullet, so he asked someone from the audience to come on stage.

Several came. They were all in blue uniforms and they put handcuffs on him. They led him into the wing and pointed at Bonnie.

"But that's just magic," he said.

"Magic or not, she's dead."

"Of course," he admitted. "You didn't expect me to fake it, did you?"

Somebody cried, "Lynch him," and a man with his collar turned backward came and said, "Don't you know it's a sin to kill?"

"It's just magic," Sasko insisted. "And very poor magic on my own world. I was excited because it was inferior . . . "

A siren sounded outside and somebody said the riot squad was coming to close the place and arrest everybody connected with the show.

Photographers gathered round and took Sasko's picture while he stood handcuffed to an officer with the still two halves of Bonnie in the background.

A guard formed round him to keep him from being injured by the outraged mob that had marched upon the stage and into the wing.

"If you're so good at magic," somebody yelled, "why don't you disappear?"

Sasko felt very humble and sad. The old sense of inferiority was coming back. When he'd used props and done things by trickery on his own planet he'd been labeled a moron. And it wasn't that he wanted to do things that way; it was just that he had to. Now he'd performed the feat in a straightforward and honest manner and they were calling him a murderer.

"It's just magic," he repeated for lack of something better to say.

"If it is," a photographer said, snapping a picture, "the act will get the biggest booking in the history of show business."

"It is," Bonnie said, rising. "Now cut out the nonsense and let's get better booking. My sister wants a big brother and we'll need enough to live on. He told you it was magic all along."

THE END

WHY DON'T YOU PULL YOUR HAIR OUT BY THE ROOTS AND HAVE DONE WITH IT?

You might as well, if you're going to let dandruff and scale and skin rash make you bald as an egg. You've bought plenty of preparations and they don't work, you say? Of course they haven't! You've probably been cheated as many times as I have. I'll bet I've spent hundreds of dollars on fine-dandy goo and wound up with worse dandruff than I started with. Made me plenty mad, too. I always get mad when I think of the lousy punk designed to chisel your honest dollars out of you. Mad enough so that when I find something good, I'm not bashful about telling my friends about it. And OTHER WORLDS readers are my friends. I had dandruff all my life, and despaired of getting rid of it, until one day Ken Arnold (the flying saucer man) left a half bottle of Turn-er's at my home, and flew off to Boise without it. I tried the stuff, because Ken's no sissy, and doesn't put perfume on his hair. Well, in one week my dandruff was gone. And my hair had begun to darken. My wife tried it, and her rash disappeared. You can bet we wrote Ken in a hurry and asked where he got it! And now, we're telling you. But don't just take our word for it—here are a few testimonials from our readers, to back us up.

As I have about used up one bottle of your hair preparation, please send me another. I have had very good results in ridding myself of dandruff and itching. Lionel O. Brandberg, Sharon Springs, Kans.

Enclosed find money order for $10.00 for two more bottles of Turn-er's as soon as possible. You sure found a good product. In the sixth application my dandruff was cured. Thanks to you. It does all you say and more, too. And it sure brings back the natural color to your hair. Thanks! R. E. Van Gordon, 1905 W. Milham Road, Kalamazoo, Mich.

Enclosed please find check for $5.00 for another bottle of Turn-er's as soon as possible. I have been bedeviled by a terrible itching in my eyebrows for over thirty years. It seemed to be a large flaky dandruff, but if I combed it out too near the skin, a watery substance would start, causing a scab-like condition. I have been to dozens of doctors . . . none did the slightest bit of good. After reading what Ray Palmer said, I decided to try Turn-er's. After the sixth application, I have not had an itch in my brows, and the skin underneath is as clear and clean as my face. I certainly am thankful to Mr. Palmer for bringing such a fine product to my attention.—S. W. Crusen, 2336 Fillmore Ave., Buffalo 14, N. Y.

Enough? Well, then take it from Ray Palmer, one bottle of

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Who were the three men in dark suits that visited them? Were they government agents, or agents of other planets? Whoever they were, they have silenced the researchers.

Now . . . in THEY KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT FLYING SAUCERS, you may read the facts behind this frightening story — facts never before published!

Gray Barker, the author, was Chief Investigator for the International Flying Saucer Bureau—an organization which had its principal leader silenced by three men in black before he could reveal to the world his solution of the flying saucer mystery. Other leading investigators have also been intimidated. All their stories are here.

Grey Barker remains one of the unsilenced few. His true, amazing report includes eye-witness accounts of the famed Flatwoods "monster", which landed on a dark West Virginia hillside.

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It comes in several forms—either in individual aluminum foil envelopes (it'll never deteriorate!) containing just enough to make one batch, enough for eight people; or in 1-lb. bags, or in 5-lb. cans (in case you run a restaurant, and you want to have people lined up for blocks waiting for that WONDERFUL CHILI they can get only at YOUR place). Send for any amount you want, from one small envelope to a ton. Your money back, if your palate doesn't tingle with delight.

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Need more chili seasoning, as I have been eating it until it almost comes out of my ears! Just can't seem to get enough of it. Enclosed find my check for $3.50 for which please send me five cartons of five 8-person servings, and I will be able to continue my orgy of chili. Have several friends who are anxious to try it out also. C. A. Andrew, 905 E. Isaacs Ave., Walla Walla, Washington.

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